

Sermons Preached by the Rev. Raymond Shaheen, D. D.

<u>Year: 1965</u>	<u>SERMON TITLE</u>	<u>TEXT</u>
January 3	"God's Visible Presence" (- - it all happened in Christ!)	John 1:14
January 17	"Like Water Turning Into Wine"	John 2:11
January 24	"And Behold, A Leper - -"	Matthew 8: 2-3
January 31	"In His Presence There Is Peace"	Matthew 8: 23-27
February 7	" - And Always The Enemy"	Matthew 13: 24-30
February 7	"With The Royalty Robes Of Heaven"	Colossians 3: 12
February 14	"Goodness Unlimited"	Matthew 20: 15
February 21	"In An Honest And Good Heart"	Luke 8: 15
March 7	"A Study In Temptation"	Matthew 4: 1-11
March 14	"A Study In Faith"	Matthew 15: 21-28
March 21	"A Study In Reality"	Luke 11: 28
March 28	"A Study In Compassion"	John 6: 5-6
April 4	"A Study In Defiance"	John 8: 46
April 11	Palm Sunday Reflections	Matthew 21: 6-7
April 18	"Love's Reward"	Matthew 28
April 25	"Honest Doubt"	John 20: 24-25
MISSING May 9	"That Home In Nazareth"	Luke 2: 51-52
May 16	"The Work Of The Holy Spirit"	John 16: 7-8
May 23	"If You Ask Anything"	John 16: 23
May 30	"Witnesses"	John 15: 26-27

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SERMON TITLE

TEXT

June 6	"The Spirit-Possessed"	Acts 2: 4
June 20	"God Is Love"	I John 4: 16
June 27	"The Fear Of The Lord"	Proverbs 9:10
July 4	"God's Greater Love"	Luke 15: 10
July 11	"A Sermon For Every One Of Us"	Luke 6: 36-37
July 18	"God's Kind Of Man"	I Peter 3: 15
July 25	"Tilted Halos"	Matthew 20: 20
August 29	"Saints, Beware!"	Luke 18: 9
September 5	"The First Workman" (Beginning series of sermons based on the Gospel of John)	
September 12	"A Window In Time"	John 1: 1
September 19	"Real Life"	John 1: 4
September 26	"The Light Of Men"	John 1: 4
October 10	"And The Darkness"	John 1: 5
October 17	"A Man Named John"	John 1: 6
October 24	"Every Man "	John 1: 9
October 31	"The True Church"	John 8: 31-32
November 7	"One Man's Venture In Faith"	John 4: 46-47
November 14	"A Man Named Philip"	John 1: 43-44
November 21	"A Man Named Nathaniel"	John 1: 46
November 28	"He Came - The Unrecognized"	John 1: 10
December 5	"He Came - The Unwanted"	John 1: 11
December 12	"He Came - The Accepted"	John 1: 12

1965- continued

SERMON TITLE

TEXT

MISSING

December 19

"He Came - In Person"

John 1: 14

MISSING

December 24

"The Other Miracle Of Christmas"

Luke 2: 15

December 26

"A Road With More Than One Name"

"GOD'S VISIBLE PRESENCE" (John 1:14)
(- - it all happened in Christ!)

The sermon, based upon the Gospel lesson for the day, bears the title, "God's Visible Presence"; the text, it's the 14th verse of the 1st chapter of John:

"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth."

Seldom noticed, yet it was intended that it should be impressively located, is the smallest of all of our stained glass windows in Saint Luke Church. You found it, perhaps, as you entered through the red doors - - it's immediately to your right in the narthex. It's properly referred to as the Saint Luke Window. The prominent figure in this small window is that of a man, who represents the writer of the third Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles.

But underneath the figure of a man there is a symbol. Now it so happens that each of the Gospel writers has had a symbol. The symbols have been drawn from a verse in the Bible, it's the 7th verse of the 4th chapter of the Book of the Revelation. The symbol for Mark, you see, is a man, because Mark wrote in plain ordinary speech, the simplest possible way, so a man serves as his symbol; Matthew, writing primarily for the Jews, is symbolized by a lion, because he foretold of the Messiah, the Lion of the tribe of Judah; the symbol for Luke, it's an ox - - you can see it for yourself....and why an ox? - - because as Luke wrote he wanted people to understand that Jesus Christ came into the world as a servant, and also as a sacrifice....that's what an ox was used for - - as a servant for man and as the animal of the sacrifice.

The text for today's sermon is from the Gospel according to John. And what do you suppose is the symbol for John? It's an eagle. And why did the ancient fathers choose an eagle? It was the eagle that could soar so grandly, you see, it was the eagle, more so than any other bird, that could fly even into the face of the sun without being dazzled by its light ...and the old fathers said, that's John for you! - - he can soar higher into truth than any other person, he can penetrate without being dazzled by what he sees. And there are those who maintain to this very day that the Gospel according to John brings them nearer to the very heart of God than any other book in the Bible. Today's Gospel lesson is from the Gospel according to John. Today's sermon is based upon a passage from the first chapter in the Gospel according to John - - John with so great penetration, John with such great insight.

But I must tell you quite candidly, he was not always my favorite Gospel writer, especially when I wanted to read about the Christmas story. It used to disturb me a bit when I would find chosen as the lessons for the day that there might be this first chapter from John. In a certain period in my life I found it rather dull, lacking warmth and inspiration - -

"In the beginning was the Word, and the
Word was with God, and the Word was God.
The same was in the beginning with God. - - "

...and then this one verse in particular, which is the heart of his message:

"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt
among us - - "

It just didn't send me!

I turned so instinctively, you see, to Matthew...Matthew with his Magi, Matthew with his Star - - there are some things so very fascinating about the Christmas story when Matthew told it. And there is something equally thrill-

ing about the Christmas story, God come into the world in Christ, when you read it the way Luke told it.....angels!shepherds!an angel speaking to Elizabeth - - an angel speaking to Mary - - an angel speaking to Josephthe Song!the Star! - - this was the fascination. Small wonder, then, that John was not my favorite Gospel writer, especially when I wanted to deal with the Christmas story.

But the years have come, and the years pass, and if years should do anything for a man, they ought to allow him a degree of tolerance...be tolerant with those that you can't understand - - there must be some reason why they say what they say the way they say it, there must be some reason why they do what they do the way they do it. I should like to think that the promise of maturity has permitted me a greater appreciation for John, so much so that I'm willing to say to you now that the grandest of all things that's ever been said about God - - breathtaking, if you please, is what John tells us in the verse of Scripture which serves as the text for this sermon:

"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth."

It's a tremendous thing, I tell you.

Now let me tell you why John spoke the way he did. He was no ordinary man, and he lived at an ordinary time. and he was trying to communicate with no ordinary people. At the time John wrote, the greater percentage of people who embraced the Christian faith were non-Jewish. For every person, a Christian now at the time of John, who had been a Jew, there might have been a thousand who came from the Hellenistic world. Now what do you do with people who have never been Jewish, and you want to talk to them about Jesus Christ? Do you

take them back through all the gamut of thought pattern of the Jewish world?
Doesn't God have some other way?

.....that you may better understand what I am trying to say at this point, lest this thought be alien to your mind - - chances are there isn't a single one of us right here, within the hearing of my voice, who comes from Jewish background. Since this is true, would it be a requirement for you in the Christian faith to become so thoroughly indoctrinated with Jewish thought patterns before you could begin to understand anything at all about Jesus? John says, of course not! John says, the Christian message is for all people, and maybe from time to time we may have to re-state it, we'll have to get this philosophy by which we can communicate.....and that's exactly why he wrote his Gospel the way he did. He doesn't talk about angels, he doesn't talk about shepherds - - he doesn't even talk about the promised Messiah as such.

Think what would have happened if you would have put only into the hands of a Greek a copy of Matthew's Life of Jesus Christ - - how far do you suppose the Greek would have read, if this would have been his only introduction to Jesus Christ, when in the opening pages of Matthew's Gospel Matthew goes back and talks about all the "Rabats" - - how this man gave birth to somebody else... ..even though it may have been a direct route, it would have been a story that he could not appreciate. So John, by the grace of God, endeavoring to impress upon the mind of the Greek, so very, very intelligent, the message of the Christian Gospel, said, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us."

Now let me tell you as boldly as I can how God was even getting ready for this moment six hundred years before the birth of Christ. For of all things, in the same city where John lived, six centuries before Christ there was an Ephesian philosopher by the name of Periclitus. He did not know Jesus Christ,

he knew nothing of Jewish concepts, but he was a man who did a great deal of thinking - - some of the thinking that you've done, for every man thinks these things through for himself, to a degree at least. Periclitus sat one time by a river's edge, and he thought to himself.....

...what gives in this world? This world is like this river - - it's always on the move...and Periclitus gave us this figure of speech, in which he says it's impossible for a man to step twice into the same river ...you step into the river once, you step out of the river, then you step back in...but it's not the same river, - - for the water keeps flowing, this constant movement. Periclitus said, that's the way life is - it's always moving, always going somewhere...but Periclitus, more so than any other man of his day, said, but there's some design to it all, there's some pattern, and there's some purpose...and he even said that that's the way it is with an individual life...and he said all of history moves with an aim and a purpose in mind, because behind all the created world there is a Master-Mind - - there is Reason to everything....

...and the Greeks had a word for it, and the Greek word was logos, which can be interpreted either as word or as reason.

John, who had been a Jew, knew that even before the time of Christ the Jews had a word - - that word it is - - WORD....and this was the symbol, this was God Himself, because in the Hebrew concept a word is a dynamic thing...it was by the Word of the Heavens that these things were created, it was by the Word of God that this thing was done. And John did something that no other person has

ever done. He took the Jewish concept of God, active - - God, dynamic, and made it almost one with a Greek concept of logos and reason. And so that's why he was able to write to the Greeks and to say, "And the Word - - your mind, if you please, became a person....this Idea that's at work in the world, that's shaping and fashioning all things, took on human flesh, and lived here among us."

What would you say is the most breath-taking thing that men have ever said about God? Would you believe me if I were to tell you that John supplies the answer, when he declares in the words of this text, "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and of truth." I say to you, never since the dawn of time did man dare think of God in such staggering terms - - God breaking through and taking on human flesh!

And you know what a liability flesh is! The flesh is weak. God was willing to assume it when He identified Himself with us, in this, our world. This shouldn't be, philosophical as the overtones of this sermon may be, it ought not to be too hard for you to appreciate. You know what it is, when you're in one room, and you hear something going on in another room, there's activity there, but you can't quite make out what it is, but you know that something is going on.....or it may be the awareness of a person, but you can't quite make sure what he's like -- it may be because the room is dimly lighted...but then standing there in the doorway, in full view, is the person - - you can read his face, you can hear his voice. Then there comes the moment of complete identification, and you are no longer afraid. Could it be that way between God and us? - - something going on in the world, some power, some force, some activity - - friend or foe? - with us or against us?and then at a precise moment in time, at a specific place, God takes on human flesh, the form comes to identify Himself

with us.

Never since the dawn of time did men ever believe that it could happen. Never did they dare to think that it would happen. But it did. And only a big God can become little, and only a great God can take on the liability of flesh, and identify Himself with us. That's what John is trying to say. And this great idea, this mind, this reason, this force - - it became flesh! and lived here!

But would you believe me if I were to tell you that this isn't always what you and I want. This is the most wonderful thing that God could ever do for us, to come to us, to take on our flesh, to identify Himself with us where we are. But you know exactly what you and I want - - the opposite. For we have our times when we're sick and tired of this world, the last place in the world where we want to be is where we happen to be...our disappointments...our failures...our frustrations, and the misery, and the pathos of life - - it's too much. You and I have our moments when we pray, "God, take us away...God take us from this place to where You are - - let us have our time of perfect bliss, free from all the strain and the tension of life" - - this is what you and I pray for, we, the most security-conscious people of any generation - - "Take me away from this, God, take me to where You are!" - - "Build around me some invincible wall - - "

And what does God do? God says, "I'll come to you, and I'll stay with you, and I'll live with you." God in His wisdom says, "This is the better way." I've walked among some of you long enough, now, to know that the greatest experience that you have ever had in life is the knowledge of the truth that God is with you, that Jesus Christ is by your side. Says John the Gospel writer - -

"And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us - - "

...God is with you. This is what the Christian keeps saying, because it all happened in Christ!

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"LIKE WATER TURNING INTO WINE" (John 2:11)
(- when Christ takes over - - exhilaration
comes into a man's life)

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The sermon, based upon the Gospel for the day, bears the title, "Like Water Turning Into Wine." The text, it's the 11th verse of the 2nd chapter of John:

"This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him."

If memory serves me correctly, it's happened only once since I've been your Pastor, this is a sad fact in itself to relate....for he came and knocked at the door of the study and said he'd like to say a word to me. He had been visiting in this place, he'd been worshipping with us for some Sundays. It wasn't only that he'd made up his mind that he wanted to become a member of this congregation, but above all else, this is what he wanted me to know - - - that his life had been transformed - - that he knew what it was to have Jesus Christ as his Saviour. In essence it was this: "Look at me, Pastor, I'm a born-again Christian!".....and when I looked into his eyes I knew that something exceedingly wonderful had happened.

Maybe you're not given to talking like that. Maybe it has happened to you, too - maybe you can't be quite as articulate as he can be. But there was a joy in his heart, a joy in his soul that's unmistakable. And there's only one word for it: transformation. Something has happened, and now there is a difference, and the difference is exceedingly grand and glorious. So I begin this sermon for you, based upon a passage of Scripture from which I have kept my distance for a long time.

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I can't remember of ever having preached more than one or two sermons on this second chapter of John. I couldn't quite understand what value there was in changing water into wine. First of all, I thought something about the miracle in this regard - - it was an unwise miracle. Why, Jesus, of all people, would you provide wine for a wedding? I even grew up in a community where one didn't even so much as mention wine from the pulpit. And here the Gospel record has it, that Jesus supplied enough wine and more than enough, for a gala occasion. I thought the miracle an unwise performance.

And then, bold and brash that I was, I thought it also an unnecessary performance on the part of Jesus. You see, I thought of so many other ways in which Jesus could have begun His ministry. Maybe this was the unnecessary miracle, maybe this was the unwise miracle. And I've kept a running argument with John the Evangelist, who said, "This is the first of the miracles performed by Jesus, and in the performance of this miracle he manifested his glory, and what is more, his disciples believed in him."

...this brought no end of anguish to my soul. For making bold, I said to myself, Jesus, I can think of any number of ways by which you could have begun your ministry and I think any one of those other ways might have been better. If you wanted to begin your ministry by the performance of a miracle, how about healing, as the first miracle - - how about healing that woman with an issue of blood? ...or something else equally as dramatic, why not make that lame man to walk?...or if you really wanted to make an impression at the very beginning, Jesus, why didn't you begin with raising Lazarus from the dead? - - that would have sent them!

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...but you can't take the Scriptures and re-write the page...you can't take a pair of scissors and provide a juxtaposition of what did happen. Says John the Evangelist, "This is the first miracle, this was the first sign, this is exactly what it was - - it happened precisely at a wedding, it was the changing of a supply of water into wine" ...as much as I would like to have reversed it, and changed wine into water, the Evangelist says, it was water turned into wine.

Now whenever you come to John you have to remind yourself that John, when he reported the life of Jesus Christ, was forever looking behind the thing that happened. When he recorded what Jesus said, he was also interested in why Jesus said what He did. When he recorded what Jesus did, John was always interested in why Jesus did what He did....what is the meaning behind this thing, not only of what Jesus said, but of what He did? So now when you come to this as John records it as the first miracle, John, the old man, looking back and recording what happened could understand with greater wisdom, perhaps, and insight, than we, why this was the first of the miracles.

For I tell you, as you may have read on the front page of the MESSENGER this past week, it's more than a miracle, it's a parable. There is a lesson here being taught. It's symbolic, symbolic of transformation - - this is what happens when Jesus Christ comes into a man's life! Line up the redeemed, rank upon rank, ask any one of them, "Is there a difference in your life? - does Jesus Christ have this quality of transformation?" ...and every single one of the redeemed will say to you, without any exception whatsoever - - how drab, how unexciting, how unexhilarating was my life until Jesus Christ took over! Honestly now, that's the way it does happen.

When I go back to my home town I think I'll want to make a special mission

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to the church and to the Sunday School where I was brought up as a lad. It's always on the vacation schedule, but now I think I'd like to go back before the vacation period, and I'd like to go back and see if I can't find one of the Sunday School books, one of the hymnbooks that we used when we attended Sunday School. I've forgotten the words of a hymn that I want to remember. The hymn went something like this, "Sweeter as the years go by....Jesus's love is richer, deeper, fuller, sweeter as the years go by - - " And then there's another hymn that we used to sing, "Since Jesus came into my heart - " and the hymn-writer in that case goes on to tell about the transformation that has taken place " - since Jesus came into my heart."

....this is the beginning of the miracles....this is the beginning of the ministry of Jesus Christ.....this is the symbol of what's going to happen in a man's life, once drab, once unexciting, once unexhilarating, but then the change takes place. And this is what John is trying to say, this is the meaning of Jesus Christ.

Let us look at the miracle now.

Jesus Christ attended a wedding in Cans of Galilee. He went there as a guest. What does that mean to us? Above all else, it means that God in Christ wants to become involved in our life. Whatever it is that happens to us can be important to God, and whatever it is that claims our time, even our merriment, is something to which God can bring an added blessing. We who are servants of the Church must always remind ourselves that we cannot live in towers, detached from people. It's a mistaken notion that some preachers have that they can alienate themselves from people, have their little study in one corner of the community, and then only on a Sunday morning emerge and go straight to the pulpit, proclaim God's grace and truth, then put on their hat

and coat and go back to their little study, stay in their rendezvous until next Sunday. You just can't do that. The meaning of the Incarnation is God's identification with people, God not allowing Himself to be detached. And so Jesus Christ, knowing a wedding was taking place, made it His business to be present.

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What a blessing that bride and that groom must have known when they beheld on the face of Jesus Christ the smile of favor, and as long as they lived would they not remember that it was at their wedding that Jesus was present? Wisely the Christian Church through all the years has always insisted that those who would exchange promises to each other should exchange them as members of the Household of Faith, within the shadow of an altar. For this, above all else, you see, is to make God part of their joy, to ask God to bring an added blessing into their life, and into their love. So you begin at that point. God does not keep Himself detached from us, God wants to become involved in everything that's part of our life, even the page of a social calendar.

The second thing that you observe is this: that this miracle took place, not in church, not while they were reciting the pages of the Torah, but the miracle took place when Jesus Christ graced a home with His presence. This wonderful thing happened in a home, where people lived, and where invited guests had come. The last place in the world where some people expect Jesus Christ to appear or even to bring a blessing is within the confines of the precincts of where they live, in their relationships with those who are nearest and dearest to them. Yet this is precisely where Jesus Christ wanted to come and make His impact - - in your homes - - where you live, where you share your relationships ever so intimately.

The third observation: the miracle happened that it might bring a special glory to the end of the celebration. The steward said, I can't believe it!

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...the guests said, we can't understand it! - - the best wine comes now, just when we're ready to go home. Ordinarily it's just the opposite - you give the good wine first, and then when the guests have drunk quite a great deal and they can't tell much difference between what's good and what's bad, then you let them have the inferior stuff! (using the language of the world, you see).....but in this case, the best came at the end. This is parabolic of the whole Christian life.....the longer you stay with Jesus Christ, the greater the blessing at the end.

Sometimes we know a great deal of excitement and enthusiasm at the beginning of a new venture. You've heard me echo and re-echo this thought, when as a couple standing here at the chancel step, about to make promises to each other, as their Pastor I charge them with basic Christian truth, and every now and then you hear the overtones of it - - "This is the bright and the happy day in your life...your love is young. But what happens when your love grows older? Will enthusiasm wane? Will your devotion and respect for each other be as insipid, as tasteless as water? Or in the older years of your married life will there still be the degree of exhilaration and joy?"where Christ is present this always happens - - the best is yet to be.

I do not agree with William Cowper, the hymn writer, who once wrote, "Where is the blessedness I knew when first I saw the Lord? Where is the soul-refreshing view of Jesus and His Word? What peaceful hours I once enjoyed, how sweet their memory still - - "this, I say to you, is not a true picture of the Christian life, - - this is the story of a man who lost his enthusiasm for Christ, who separated himself from his Redeemer, and now he wants it back again. This is not the true story of progress in the Christian life.

The true story of progress in the Christian life is that one goes from one

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stage to an ever more glorious stage. You watch the next time when you build a fire in your fireplace....you bring in the logs, you bring in the kindling - - immediately at the very beginning, the brightness, the spitting, the crackling of a fire. What is the best part of the fire? - - when the fire settles down, and the glow is a quiet glow, and the heat is a substantial heat.....

"Thou hast saved the best wine until the end"

...with Christ, the best is always ahead
of us. This I most certainly believe.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"AND BEHOLD, A LEPER - -"

(- When the illimitable Grace of God
is confronted by the faith-filled
heart)

The sermon bears the title, "And Behold, A Leper" and the text is from the Gospel for today, portions of the second and third verses of the 8th chapter of Matthew:

"And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.
And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed."

I beg you, whatever you do, don't read that word casually. There is wonder, and there's excitement in that word, "And, behold - "

....better still if somehow you could substitute for the word

"behold" such an expression as this -

...Imagine it - the incredible happened!

...of all things! can you believe what I'm going
to tell you now?

- - that a leper, of all people, came and
threw himself at the feet of Jesus Christ!

You can't possibly appreciate this text unless you permit yourself to consider what it was like to be a leper. To the ancients, leprosy was the dread disease. Once it was diagnosed, a man was given up for dead. Such an idea persisted even through the Middle Ages, and it was the priest of the church himself who, having been told that such-and-such a person in his parish was leprosy, would take the leper even at a safe distance, enter the nave, and as he would hold the crucifix in his hand he would read for the leprosy one the Order for the Burial of the Dead, for from that moment on, to all

intents and purposes, this was a man without hope. From then on, there would come to him certain death, and death by inches.

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It was just about a year ago that I saw for the first time a leper...you remember, I wrote you about it. They took me to the outskirts of Rajahmundry. There on the banks of the river and by the railroad track a little colony, pathetic to behold, of course they were, not because they had also advised me in advance that they were to be re-located, uprooted from their home that they had always known, but because of what I could sense for myself, what was revealed to me as I looked at them - - they would never, never get any better. If anything, they would get worse....bandages on their feet, only nubs where their hands had been, and the almost clawlike features.

They tell me there are two kinds of leprosy. There's one kind of leprosy that will bring death within a period of nine years. A man gets little nodules on his body, and then eventually these nodules become ulcerated, and they discharge something that's very, very foul. A man begins to stare with his eyes, he loses his hair - - it could be that he'd become almost as crippled as an arthritic.....and then death will come. He goes into a coma, and the release which is the final blow.

There's another kind of leprosy. It begins in this way, one loses all sensation....it spreads throughout the body...eventually the toes fall off, and even the hands just drop. This could go on, mark you, for twenty-five to thirty years.

When Jesus was here on earth they had rules and regulations concerning lepers. They had to live outside the walls of the city, they were not permitted where other people were. Even to this day in India, mark you, I was surprised to discover - - if I remember it correctly, it was Friday when some

one leper, representing all the other lepers, was permitted to walk the village streets, and that for the purpose of begging. In the day of Jesus, lepers were required to call out whenever they would go near the village....

"Unclean.....unclean.....unclean - - "

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...the leper himself had to assume the responsibility of not defiling the unafflicted. When you go into the Chapel of the Grateful Heart you'll see one of the stained glass windows, it portrays the grateful leper. Look not only at the bandages on his limbs, but also look as he holds in his hand the bell. It was not really a beggar's bell, it was required by law - - he had to ring the bell to give warning to people that he was somewhere near. And it was an absolute decree that no leper dared approach within six feet of another person... ..and if the wind happened to be blowing, he'd have to keep himself at least one hundred feet away from anybody else. Rabbis were known not to eat an egg that was purchased on a street on which a leper happened to walk. That's what it was to be a leper....to be unclean...to be separated....to be classified as one who was enjoying (terrible thought) certain death.

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And then, one day, mark you, one day - - there was that leper, who having heard of Jesus Christ, threw caution to the winds, forgot all about rules and regulations and came with complete abandon and threw himself at the feet of Jesus Christ and cried out, "If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." Whatever you do, my friend, don't read those words casually. There's wonder and excitement in the thought "and behold, a leper - - ".....brave and bold, and doing what no other leper would dare to do....and falling at the feet of Jesus Christ, and worshipping Him, and saying, "If you will, you can make me clean."

If you think there's wonder and excitement in the fact that the leper came, there's greater wonder and there's greater excitement in the thought that Jesus

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Christ came and did what no one else would do - - the unafflicted touched the afflicted. He did not heal him at six feet away. He touched him. Compassion to be true compassion must always mean identification. One of the things that thrilled me when I took that picture of the lepers was the fact that my friend Dr. Robert Oberley, who has been a missionary in India for a number of years, went and stood alongside of him, he even with his clean hands went and held their afflicted hands in his hands, that I might even get a better picture of them. Oh, you can't say to me, but it is different now, they can arrest leprosy - - it's not nearly as contagious.....all of this may be truestill a leper is a loathsome thing - - ugly - - not at all a pretty sight. And my friend went and stood alongside of them, and held their hands in his, reflecting in his day something of the very spirit of Jesus Christ.

Why do I tell you all of this about the leper? Why do I paint for you as vividly as I can the picture of the leprous ones? For the ancients, leprosy was the dread disease. I paint the picture for this reason: you and I are leprous - - not physically, but we too are afflicted by disease, the disease of evil, the disease of sinning. There isn't a single one of us who has not been contaminated.

And the leprosy of the soul, which is sin, also spells certain death. And the most unattractive of all people is the sinner, whose very face reflects all the characteristics of the doomed, those who are hell-bound, who may either know it, or not know it. Sin is the leprosy of the soul.

But then, one day, we were introduced to Jesus Christ, and hope began to spring within our breast....."I can be forgiven! - - I can be redeemed! - - I can be cleansed!" I tell you this morning with all the ardor of my soul, you do not know the meaning of redemption unless you first recognize the fact

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of the leprosy of the soul. There can be no salvation unless you're being saved from something - - "Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins" - - it is not for me to tell you how you became contaminated. I only know that you are, even as I know that I am. I also know that there is none to whom I can go except the Saviour, and Jesus Christ alone can speak the perfect word.

Once I heard a missionary relate this story. I have never, never heard it since. I pass it on to you. He had been a missionary in Africa, and he came back to tell that some of the missionaries told about an African chief who said that there was a man in the tribe who had a cure for leprosy. For weeks and months and years they looked for the man, and one day they found him. Think of it! - - a man who had a cure for leprosy! They begged him to reveal the secret. For some strange reason he did not share it. He took the secret with him into his grave.

Why do I tell you this? Sin is the leprosy of the soul. There's no question in my mind, you know the cure for leprosy. But what if you do not tell it? What if you do not let it be shared? What of all the people who will go to certain death, eternal damnation, because you keep the secret to yourself?

There's one reason why we're not willing to share it sometime - - the leper is not a very attractive person. Remember those pictures I showed you? A sinner isn't a very attractive person, either. Some of us loathe the sight of sinners, and we want to keep our distance, and we want them to keep their distance. But what would happen if a doctor, loathing the sight of the physically afflicted, would say "I will not heal you, I will not minister to you" - - what would happen if a doctor refused to see your child, crippled,

disease-ridden, because he would say, I cannot stand the sight of something as unattractive as this? The doctor who gives himself to the healing ministry is constrained to minister. We who share and reflect the love of Jesus Christ are constrained to minister.

One of the unforgettable days that I spent in South India was in Vellore, the Christian Medical Center there, the largest and the finest of its kind in all southeast Asia. The last Sunday that I was there I said to Dr. Ruth Myers, "Won't you take me to the lepers' workshop?" They have been able to do some kind of rehabilitation with the lepers. And so she took us there after church.

I was tremendously impressed with what I saw. But what impressed me most, I think, was the sign that I saw on the wall in that workshop. Somebody had printed it and put it there - - "If it has a human face, and is in a human form confined; it may well have a human heart, it may well have a human mind. Love and help it if you can - - it may yet learn to be a man."

Whatever stature you've achieved, whatever maturity you know in Christ, I dare say it's yours because someone has loved you, despite your sinfulness.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"IN HIS PRESENCE THERE IS PEACE"

(Matthew 8:23-27)

(- whatever the storm of life - Christ can calm it)

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The sermon bearing the title, "In His Presence There Is Peace" is based upon the Gospel for today; and the text is the 26th verse of the 8th chapter of Matthew:

"And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful
O ye of little faith? Then he arose, and
rebuked the winds and the sea; and there
was a great calm."

Let's get the facts straight at once. This is the account of a miracle. And when you come to a miracle, you can classify people into two groups. There are those who immediately believe, they raise no questions, they accept it. On the other hand, there are those who say, we cannot believe. We refuse to believe anything at all that's supernatural, because everything can be explained, and anything that can be explained ought to be understood.

And this is exactly, then, what they will do with this miracle. They will not call it a miracle, they'll say, "This is what we know. You must understand the terrain - - the Jordan valley is unique, cutting, as it is, a mighty cleft, creating an unusual atmosphere, unusual climate. The Sea of Galilee is about 686 feet below sea level. Because of the nature of the land, storms come up quickly, without any warning whatsoever, and just as quickly they can subside. That's the way it happens - - "

...and so they walk away from this account of Scripture, failing to see the tremendous truth that's inherent in it. It's one thing to

refuse it as a miracle, it's another thing to fail to see the truth which is implicit in this wonderful occurrence.

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Let me say to you as your Pastor, the greatest single asset you may ever be able to bring to God is a willingness on your part to believe Him, a disposition on the part of your mind to accept Him. You won't find it on every page of Scripture, but it's written largely on certain occasions -- when Jesus had to plead with the people and say, "Why won't you believe? -- -- Why aren't you willing to accept what I say? -- " And because of their hardness of heart, refusing to believe, they denied themselves the most wonderful thing that can ever happen to a man, that is to come to grips with the Eternal, and to be blessed by the assurance of the tremendous truth which is God himself. Whatever else you may do with this passage of Scripture, let me tell you this at once: that they were not a bunch of sceptics aboard ship. The miracle did occur, else it would never have been recorded, else you and I would never know anything at all about it.

And if a miracle is to occur, then there must always be some amount of faith. I'm not forgetting, or course I'm not forgetting, that our Lord said to them, "O ye of little faith - ".....but He did say that they had some faith. They had enough faith by which to begin, they had enough faith by which they could turn to Jesus Christ and recognize Him as One who might be able to do what they couldn't do. It may not be a lot, it may only have been a little, but it was enough to make them turn in the direction of Jesus Christ. Oh, I'm not forgetting that Jesus Christ said, "O ye - why are ye fearful? - "it's one thing to be frightened, it's another thing to be faithless. Fearful as they were, they still had some degree of faith. Let me say it again, the miracle did not occur with a ship-load of sceptics

aboard. They did have some faith.

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Now, there is also this to be said, that Jesus Christ knew how these storms came quickly, and because He did, aren't you inclined to marvel at the fact that He allowed himself to get inside a ship and go off to sleep? True, the sea was calm when He did it, but He also knew that momentarily it could become a seething storm. You can read for yourself what had happened before He went out onto the sea with His disciples. This was the time when a great multitude came out to hear Him preach, and extraordinary gesture accorded Him...and the size of the multitude was so great that He even had to use the boat as a pulpit, and He pushed out from the shore, that He might be able to preach to all of them, this mass assembled on the shores. Of course it took a great deal out of Him. You have no idea, unless you should stand where the preacher stands, to know how physically, spiritually and emotionally exhausted a man can become once he has confronted people with the fact of God, especially as he's preaching. Physically, emotionally, spiritually exhausted, He went into the ship, knowing full well that a storm momentarily could arise, and went off to sleep. Doesn't that mean something to you?

Well, now, what can we deduct from the miracle? Let us begin where we can begin -- let us say we want to believe, let's say we want this miracle to speak to the condition of our souls. For the moment, let's look at the disciples. Call them the frightened ones, call them the scared ones. This is enough, then, to speak to your condition and to my condition, because whether you've reached the place in your life or not, we are the frightened generation, we are the ones who are running scared. That's why some of us don't want to go off into a corner and think very long....because when we recognize

all the things that could happen to us, when we realize how much bitterness and hatred and cynicism there is in this world of which you and I are a part, it's an explosive situation. We are the people who for the first time in history could in a moment be blotted out of existence. We are the first generation of man who in the shortest possible of time could completely annihilate themselves. This is enough to drive any man stark crazy.

Just before World War II there was a man who wrote a book called "Epitaph For Europe" and in that book he had a striking statement in which he characterized our generation -- we are the people who lack courage of heart, we are the people who do not know the laughter of the unafraid....we laugh at the wrong things, and we are afraid of the wrong things. If for no other reason than that, then this miracle ought to speak to your condition and to mine, because we are the frightened ones. So were they....they had come upon a situation over which they had no control....they had come upon a situation for which they had not prepared themselves.

Now there are some of us who say we're not afraid of anything as long as we know it's coming. If we can read the signs of the future, and know what lies ahead, as long as we have time to get ready, we can keep composed -- as long as we've time to tap available resources, as long as we have time to know into what direction we ought to look....but when the thing comes suddenly, without any warning, then we panic. There are some of us like that. And that's the situation in which these disciples found themselves. It came ever so quickly -- they had no available resources on their own, and they were afraid. But they had one advantage that some of us do not have. They had Jesus Christ within reach, and they believed that they could turn to Him and that He could do something about it.

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We who try to read the signs of the times today, who try to put our finger upon the pulsebeat of humanity in the contemporary scene, are forced to admit that there are many people today who not only believe that they've lost control of a situation, but that they also believe that God has lost control of it, and this is the greater pessimism. Let me share with you two things out of the mouth of a child: The little girl who prayed, "O God, do take care of yourself, because if anything happens to you, then we're ai sunk! - - "and the second thing that came out of the mouth of a child, when she was awakened one night by a terrific storm, she cried out to her father. "Daddy, Daddy, what are we going to do? - - even God has lost control of the wind! - - "

....this is the greater pessimism. And there are those in our day who believe this.....man who is so clever, man who has received from God so great freedom, has brought himself into a situation where even God stands by and even God, either unwilling or unable, does nothing.

This is not the philosophy of the Christian. Pessimism does not belong in the vocabulary of the believer. Some of us marked in respect the great gesture that belonged to Winston Churchill yesterday. Whatever else you can say about that man, the Man of the Century - - said by many people to be the greatest living person of his day....he was not a pessimist. That's why he was able to do so much.

Let me tell you this - - that the first lesson that some of us have to learn is that life's sea is not always calm. There is always the possibility of storm, stress, and of strain...always the possibility of sorrow, always the possibility of doubt, and always the possibility of failure - - and then always the possibility of that terrible thing, of uncontrolled passion. Against such soul-weather who among us has not known the very shaking of the foundations of faith? That's the first lesson that a man learns, that he

lives in an unsteady world.

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But the second and greater lesson should be this: that in the midst of so great unsteadiness, in the midst of so great uncertainty, is always Jesus Christ. The storm came, they were in the midst of it - - and so was Jesus Christ! Jesus Christ never promised you, He never promised me that He'd give us a kind of umbrella that would shield and protect us from all of the elements of life. In fact, to the contrary, He said if any man went after Him and would follow Him - - - something about a cross? It could happen...it does happen... ..but in the midst of it there is Jesus Christ.

"One of the great answers of history was given by Luther to the Cardinal legate at Augsburg. The Pope had sent the Cardinal to compel Luther by any means to recant. Everything - bribes and entreaties and threats - had been tried in vain. The Cardinal was amazed that anyone should so withstand the command and the might of the Pope. 'Do you think the Pope cares for the opinion of a German boor?' demanded the Cardinal. 'The Pope's little finger is stronger than all Germany. Do you expect your princes to take up arms to defeat you? I tell you, no! And where will you be then?' 'Then as now,' said Luther, 'in the hands of Almighty God!' - - " This is what you can believe, come wind or weather, Jesus Christ is there.

Because I am your Pastor I can tell you this. The Annual Meeting was over. There had been some time for reflection, and then sleep came quickly... ..only to be awakened by the sound of the telephone bell at one o'clock Tuesday morning. "Pastor, won't you please come to the hospital?" To the hospital the Pastor went, only to discover that death already had claimed another soul. That was the initial impression. But as the Pastor stood there with two stalwart souls, in the face of sudden death, there was peace, there was serenity,

there was the blessed assurance that, come wind or weather, even there just outside that door of the emergency room, with a loved one lifeless - blessed peace.....because I stood with them in the Presence of Jesus Christ.

The storm came, they were frightened....but they had enough faith, that disciple band, to look to Jesus Christ, and in His presence there was peace. You can believe this, my friend, and when you do, nothing, absolutely nothing, can shake it.....this I wish for myself.....I covet it for you.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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" - AND ALWAYS THE ENEMY "
(Matthew 13:24-30)

(- life is never free from the force of evil)

The sermon is based upon the Gospel for the Day and it bears the title, "And Always The Enemy." The text is the 25th verse of the 13th chapter of Matthew:

"But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way!"

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It was a generation or so ago, he was the best-known of all New England preachers; and one day a lady was asked why she went to hear him preach, for he was a very learned man, she was a unlearned woman. The person who asked the question was very curious as to how she might answer; and this was her answer: "Really now, it isn't that I much understand what he says, but I get such a thrill out of seeing him stand up there, and believing that all the people to whom he preaches, that all of them are as good as he is. That's what he thinks about them, that's what he feels about the human race, and it's a tonic to my soul to find someone who believes that there's so much good in human nature."

Maybe that's the way people felt about Jesus Christ. There were always those who came to hear Him preach, not always understanding what He said, but always detecting in one degree or another, that here was someone who believed in the goodness of God and the fact that that goodness of God could be reflected in human nature. If this is what they believed about that Galilean, the itinerant preacher, then they came in for the surprise of their life when they heard Him on this particular occasion.

Let me remind you what He said. He said that once upon a time there was a man who had a field, and his servants came, surprised and shocked, and said, we thought you sowed only good seed in your field....you ought to see

what we discovered now! -- as the crop is beginning to mature, we find so many weeks...tares....darnel, that's the name for it. Immediately the farmer said, if this is so, then an enemy has done it....somebody has come and sown bad seed in my field.

Chances are the people who heard Him speak like this must have said to themselves, "Tell us," -- "Tell us, Master Preacher, tell us, Good One from God, that it just isn't so! Go on permitting us to believe that there is no evil, that all people are good. Don't tell us, O Master Preacher, that this story actually happened."

....it might have been that out of their own experience they would have known that it had happened. But when they heard Him preach, they were encouraged to believe in the basic goodness of human nature. And now, the subject for His sermon that day might have been the subject for this sermon -- "And Always The Enemy."

We recognize at once that Jesus Christ did not ignore the fact of evil. There are those who make the mistake as they go through life and put blinders on their eyes, and say, there is no evil....it's just an illusion -- there is no evil....it's just the mistakes that people make -- there is no evil....it's just immaturity, it's just blindness, it's just ignorance. Jesus Christ did not talk that way. Much to the surprise of the people who heard Him, He called evil by name, and He said, "This thing is bad! -- and the thing that has happened is the work of a person who is an enemy."

One of the first lessons in life that we do well to master is that there is such a thing as evil, and that you never know where it's going to raise its ugly head, but raise its ugly head it will. Point No. One from the Master Preacher: Evil is a force in life that cannot be ignored, it must be recognized. Happy indeed is the child who grows up in a home, happy indeed is

the Sunday School scholar being properly indoctrinated in the truth, that he will recognize at once, early in life, the fact of evil, and that in one way or another he'll have to do business with it or against it.

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One goes back occasionally to the impressionable years of his life. The most impressionable years of my life were spent in the shadows of Camp Nawakwa, in those unforgettable summer camping periods. I am indebted to a man of God who took me aside one Sunday afternoon, the last day in camp, I who was in love with life, I who believed in the goodness of every single human soul.....and then he shook me to the very foundations when he said that "evil is a part of life -- it could be that as we evaluate you here at camp you haven't made the necessary preparation to face it, and one day the Evil One will catch you off-guard. If I can do anything for you," he said, "let me alert your soul to it now." And then he walked away. And the blessing of that momentary conference, so it seemed, has continued to this very day.

If you please, this is the kind of thing that Jesus Christ is saying to His hearers....."I am good, I believe in you, I will offer you nothing but love....but this is not the whole story -- don't ask me to explain it --"

...and incidentally, you know that Jesus Christ never explained the fact of evil. He just doesn't tell you how it happens to be a part of life, and don't you try to do it either -- don't you say to yourself, well, if God is good, why does He allow evil to exist? -- and then be tempted to lose all faith in the good God, just because He happens to recognize the fact of evil and allows it to go on. Jesus Christ did not spend His time trying to explain why it was there, but He did seem in duty bound to tell us that we should recognize the fact of its existence. Well that's the first

surprise that comes in this parable. Jesus Christ says, let me tell you that there is subh a thing as evil.

The second surprise is this: that evil and good may abide side by side. And if you want a real shocker, you can also get it in this parable, when you recognize the deduction as the parable reveals its truth that there is a time when you may not be able to tell evil from good, good from evil. And that's enough to trouble any man's soul. Remember what He said....the seed was sown, he put in the good seed, the enemy came and sowed the bad seed....and then because of the lay of the land, because of the nature of the seed, they grew side by side, and it was only as they began to mature, only as they grew and the stalk began to head, and there you could see the evidence of the grain...that you could see any difference whatsoever. And up until that time it was growing side by side.

This is the kind of world in which you and I live. It's absolutely impossible for anyone who takes the name of Jesus Christ to say to himself: Well from this moment on I shall live in a hot-house kind of situation...and yet, do you not realize that there is no single place on this earth where weeds do not grow! - granted anything else grows. Now this, too, we must recognize, that there is a time when evil and good grow side by side, and you cannot tell the difference between the two.

And because this is so, Jesus Christ would permit us to understand that judgment is not always yours nor mine to exercise. What may appear as evil could be good down deep underneath. And you know the kind of thing He was always talking about....

" the white-washed sepulchre - "

..."the cup that was washed on the outside"

...you know what they used to tell us about not being able to judge a book

by its cover? This, too, you see, is a troublesome thing, for as we run our course through life we in ourselves may not be in a position of making an actual judgment as to who is evil and who is good; and perhaps the most pathetic of all things that can happen in human nature is for any one of us to completely mark off the books anyone who appears to be evil.

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You don't know him, but every now and then when I go back to my home town I look for him. A lot of people have marked him off the books completely, and yet, if I could allow myself the luxury of having an opinion, or a judgment, there are times when I'd stack him up alongside some pillars in the church and some of that town's so-called saints. For there has been a time, you see, when I had an insight, and I saw something exceedingly precious, a diamond in the rough. And the lamentable thing is that there are so many in that town who have already completely ignored him. Because this is true, you see, one must be very careful, for the apparently evil and the apparently good may exist side by side. Well these are the surprises, you see, that God Himself should even recognize the fact of evil....these are the surprises, that God should even allow evil to exist, and not only to allow it to exist, but to allow it to exist side by side with good.

And what will you do with this, when in the parable the servants come and say, "Can we rip it up right now? Let's get rid of it! - " ...and Jesus, who tells the story, says that the man was right when he said, "No - not right now...lest when you eradicate the evil you also uproot the good!" What does that mean? It means best that within your power and within my power it is never given for you and me through human effort to completely eradicate the evil.

But over and above all of that is the undiscourageable faith of God,

which believes that though evil may exist, it cannot ultimately destroy the good; if evil must have its day, let it have its day -- good ultimately will triumph. And in the time of Judgment, then they came, then they knew the one from the other, then they destroyed the evil....but the good was safely gathered.

Now....the great joy. There is such a thing as Judgment, and that Judgment belongs to God. And at the time of the harvest He makes the decision, and the good receives its triumph. No matter how much we may wish it otherwise, the cruel fact remains that life is never without its force of evil... and the more one may strive to do good and champion what is right, the more a man must prepare himself to do battle against the ever-present foe of truth.

What now can we say to this? Let the believer beware! Evil is always within reach, and man in his own strength is no match for it. But there does come a time when evil has second place. He never gets beyond it, when the believer allows God to have the ascendancy, when the believer allows himself to believe in the purposes of God for him will prevail.

There is a story of a farmer who was not a believer...and he had a peculiar kind of pride in taunting the people of the community who did believe. And he said to one of the believers on a certain day....."Look at my field --

....I plowed my field on Sunday

....I sowed my grain on Sunday

....I cultivated that field on Sunday

....I gathered my crops on Sunday - I had the finest

yield, come October, of any farmer in the valley.

....what, now, do you say about that, you who believe in God,

- - you who keep His commandments, you who keep His day holy - ?

....I tell you, come October, I'll have the finest crop
in the valley!"

.....and the believer to whom this was said simply replied,

"God doesn't always settle His accounts in October."

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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Notes on a sermon delivered in Augustana Church, Washington, D. C. at the time of the installation of the Rev. Massie Kennard as Associate Pastor
February 7, 1965

"WITH THE ROYAL ROBES OF HEAVEN"

Text: "Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy
and beloved, compassion, kindness,
lowliness, meekness and patience - -
and above all these - - put on love."
(Colossians 3:12)

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When Harry Emerson Fosdick was invited to preach to the students in a Middle Eastern university, he was carefully coached by his host. His friend was eager to have Fosdick accepted from the beginning so his preaching could be effective in every way. However, the students represented some twelve or fourteen different religions, and most of them impatient with Christians because they held that they had only one aim - - simply to convert. So the American preacher was warned that in all likelihood they would hold him suspect and with marked indifference. The good man from New York was more than equal to the occasion. He opened his sermon - even before announcing his text - with these words - "I have not come here to ask any man to change his religion, but I have come to ask whether your religion, whatever it may be, it is changing you."

In doing so, he struck a note that is decidedly Christian. For Christians have always maintained that their Saviour changes people. This the Apostle Paul firmly believed. For who knew better than he the meaning of conversion - - transformation - - even as he said it so eloquently - - "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation."

Now when a man becomes a Christian there ought to be a complete change in his personality. That is, he puts off his old self and puts on a new self.

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We do well to think in terms of the custom as practiced by some Christians, when the candidate for baptism walks down to the river's edge and is completely immersed in the flowing water. Once he emerges fellow Christians stand on the bank to greet him and they have in their hands, ready to offer the new Christian, a brand new set of clothes. So we must remember what the New Testament maintains, that Christianity does change people and any type of Christianity that works anything less than transformation is not the genuine thing. This is not to say that always the change must be dramatic. It may be a progressive thing, it may be a type of continuous daily renewal. But the sum total of all that Christ can mean to us finds itself expressed ultimately in re-creation -- a man becoming all that God meant him to be.

One of the ways by which this newness is expressed is in a man's understanding of himself. He sees himself as a son of the Heavenly Father and this sonship is expressed in the basic fact of brotherhood, for with God as his Father every man becomes his brother. This never allows for any other type of distinction. The labels that we use so easily must be cast aside lest they become labels of division and separation. The Apostle put it this way in the words that preceded the passage which is used for the Fifth Sunday After the Epiphany -- "Put on the new self -- in it there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Sythian, slave nor free man, but Christ is all in all."

As you well know, the Greeks looked down on the Barbarian. He considered himself the aristocrat of all that he surveyed. As every Bible scholar knows, the Jew had a way of looking down his nose on every other nation. Those words 'God's chosen people' oftentimes became a handicap rather than a blessing, for there were those Jews who thought that other people were fit only to be "fuel

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for the fires of Hell.' The Greeks even made distinction among the Barbarian, classifying the Sythians as the savage ones who terrorized the civilized world. We are told that the slave was not even classified in ancient law as a human being. He was merely a thing, a tool, with no rights. His master was free to do with him whatever he wished, no matter how capricious. Subsequently, there could be no fellowship in the ancient world. But in Christ all this was different. There was that persistent use of the word brother! For the new man, then, there was no such distinction, no such barrier.

The new man should wear new clothes! As someone has put it for us - - "As God's chosen ones, we are initiated into a new humanity, into a company whose status is pre-eminent because it is of Heaven." We have been chosen, and purified and loved by God himself. We are therefore to put on the garment appropriate to our high calling.

But how different the garb of the Christian is from the world. Such virtues as compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience are not in vogue as far as the world is concerned.

Take that garment of patience. It is never to be thought of as a negative sort of thing. It must be forever seen as the patience which is of God. Every page of the Old Testament indicates this grand and good attitude on the part of God toward His rebellious chosen ones - - it's the potter, you see, who takes a lump of clay and continues to re-fashion it, no matter how often, until it becomes the fit vessel. On the pages of the New Testament the patience of God is made real in Jesus Christ. It's the Master's dealing with a vascillating Peter, a doubting Thomas, a Judas who betrays.

You will notice at once that this patience is always reflected in relationship on an inter-personal basis. But this is not to be mistaken for the

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impatience that God allows when it comes to matters of issue or principle. Let me quote for you what one distinguished churchman has said: "The church that has not the courage in moments of world crisis to act or speak impetuously, but waits till memory fades and conscience is dulled and the issues are confused before venturing its cautious rebukes is not worthy of the One who in a fury of impatience strode through the desecrated temple courts. Where the church faces the obstinate evils of the world and its own inherent weakness its mood must be one of perpetual impatience. But where the issues are individual and personal, within or outside the Christian community, the Saviour can do His work only through the patience of His disciples."

We are citizens of Heaven. We must wear the garments of our new humanity. And who knows but what this is the uniform of the soul which alone gains entrance into Heaven. The precise moment when the call may come to anyone of us is never known. We cannot afford to be without these royal robes at any time.

* * *

It was also observed in the sermon that the precious ingredient that the newly installed Associate Pastor will bring to this parish is that measure of patience which reflects the divine attribute in his dealing with people.

"GOODNESS UNLIMITED"

(Matthew 20:15)

(God's nature is essentially generous -
and everyone stands to benefit by it)

The sermon bearing the title, "Goodness Unlimited" is based upon the Gospel for the Day; and the text is a portion of the 15th verse of the 20th chapter of Matthew:

" - - Or do you begrudge my generosity? - "

Do you remember how the King James Translation puts it:

" - - Is thine eye evil, because I am good? - "

Each of us seems to be drawn instinctively to the teller of stories. There's something down deep inside us that responds to truth told in story fashion. Jesus was the greatest of all tellers of stories; in fact, Mark puts it ever so extravagantly when he says that without a parable He never spoke to them - - no matter what He was about to say, He always saw fit to clothe it in story form.

Now the strange thing about it is this: that quite frequently you and I think because it's told in story fashion, that immediately we'll understand the central truth. But this does not always follow. In fact He who kept telling so many stories to people laid down three specific ground-rules, that we might better understand why He spoke in parables. As you turn one page after another in the New Testament you'll come not only upon a series of stories that Jesus told, but you can deduct for yourself at least three specifics which serve thus as guides, that we might not miss what He is trying to tell us.

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One of the guide-rules that Jesus Christ laid down in this whole matter of parables is that you must always look for the thing that Jesus Christ is saying above everything else, that is, let the parable be interpreted as Jesus Christ meant it to be understood. You and I have no right to come to any story and then walk away from it saying, this is what Jesus meant, and then adapting it to our own narrow mind, or, if you please, to our own particular prejudice. Jesus lays down for us that we in duty bound to understand the parable, to interpret it, as He meant it to be understood. Don't ever forget it.

The second thing, that when we hear the parable, when we give Him rapt attention, we are not simply to be intrigued, but then we must say: how does this truth apply to me? For the Gospel must always be relevant. Jesus Christ did not delight in talking about a never-never land. Jesus Christ did not talk about situations that did not exist. That's why so many people hated Him - - He made the Gospel so terribly relevant....and there were people who began to cringe and become disturbed, and they went away, never again to return - - because the application of the truth was such a troublesome thing, it irritated them, and it annoyed them.....

....I have come to be convinced that there are two things that make a sermon effective: one, if it raises questions, and not simply gives answers. If the preacher can set your mind to thinking, if the preacher can cause you to raise questions that you hadn't raised before - - important questions - - then he has served a purpose. And the second thing is, and perhaps far more important than the first, if I can send you away from the pulpit with something in your mind and with your heart that applies to your situation, or if, as the Quakers put it so

magnificently, if the preacher can speak to your condition - - your
life situation....then he has preached effectively....
....this is the second guide-line that Jesus Christ lays down in the under-
standing of any parable: How can I apply this truth - -

to my life - -

where I happen to be - -

the situation in which I find
myself?

And the third thing is deduced from something that He said when He
told one of the most popular of all parables, the Parable of the Good Samari-
tan. When somebody asked Him a theological question, and then Jesus took
His people by the hand, and He said, "Come, walk with me"...and He walked a
dusty road, He walked a very dangerous road, and He laid before them a life
situation, which none of them could ignore, which none of them could fail to
appreciate. And then He said, "You have heard the story - you understand my
point"....and then with one broad sweep of His hand, and a direct look into
every man's heart, He said, "You go, and you do likewise." The third ground-
rule is: You begin to do something with the truth - immediately. You do not
delay. It's a shameful thing, you see, to be told the truth and to know that
it applies to you, and then walk away, and do nothing.

Do you think we can apply these three ground-rules to this parable? - -
this parable, by the way, which is not easy to understand. In fact, if you
listened carefully while it was being read, you did object to it, and you
cried out - "NO! NO! NO! - ". In case you didn't have that reaction, be-
cause you might not have listened as closely as you could have or should have,

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let me take a minute or two now to remind you of what was read. It's a very interesting story, and I think Jesus must have drawn upon it from His own experience, because as a lad, or as an adult, He frequented the market-place. And one day He saw these men, in clusters, waiting for some one to come and hire them and give them a day's work. (A close parallel would be the kind of thing that you see down here almost any morning at eight o'clock at Georgia and Alaska - clusters of men waiting for some contractor to come and give them a day's work).....Jesus saw this kind of thing in the village.

And then, on one day, the man who had the greatest owning in the community, who had the largest number of fields- - - this was the day....he came at the very beginning of a work day, and he saw men - - "How about you, you, you, you....." - and knowing them in the Near East as I do, they weren't about to go off unless they knew exactly what they were going to get. Bargaining, you see, is not something new, and having bargained with the land-owner, says Jesus, off they went.

And then the land-owner found out how much work they could produce, and what the rate of production was, and because he believed that he had to make the most of this day, he went back again, and he repeated this several times in the course of the day.....a cluster here and a cluster there - - "Off to the fields you go!" It was not a six-hour day, it was not an eight-hour day...it was a twelve-hour day. And at the eleventh hour, feeling now, perhaps, with one grand push they could do all the harvesting that had to be done, and again back to the market-place, and there happened to be some people who were still idle, and off they went. And the day's work was done.

The land-owner called his paymaster - - "Pay them off." And he began

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with the men who worked one hour, the last to be hired, and he gave them a denarius.....and then shift after shift came, you see, and all the others who had been hired, even those who came at the first hour of the day, having borne the burden and the heat of the day, they got exactly the same wage as the man who only worked one hour! - - and they protest: "Unfair! Unfair!" And you would have done the same thing!

And presumably you're doing it right now. How could Jesus Christ ever become party to anything like that? Why would Jesus Christ ever relate this story?

Well He isn't posing as an expert in labor relations. This is not a treatise on economics as such. Remember now, rule number one is in the understanding of any parable - - how are we to interpret this passage? - - what is the central luminous truth, as one seminary professor has put it, that Jesus Christ wants us to understand? And you catch it in the 15th verse: "Is your eye evil because I happen to be good?" - -

"Do you begrudge me my generosity?"

Whatever else you do, you must always remember that God is a just God. This is the point at which you have to begin when you think about God. God is not about to short-change anybody. If you can't say anything else about Him, you have to admit that He's fair, and He's honest, and He's just. Now this is the truth that Jesus Christ is trying to establish in the telling of this story, because even though these people may have cried "Unfair!" - - they had no basis for saying 'unfair' to the land-owner, because when they went out to work, this was the agreement in which they entered. The man who went out at six o'clock in the morning thought it a very fair thing to work for a single denarius a day, and he believed that the land-owner was

being just when he offered him that much. God is essentially a God of justice. God gives us a fair reward.

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But this isn't the only thing that Jesus Christ came to say about God. While He is a God of justice, He is more than a God of justice. He is a God of generosity, He is a God of goodness, unlimited, He is a God who is willing to see that we get not only what we deserve but even more than we deserve. What is the desert of a man who is a sinner? Hell. For what is sin? Every time you and I are a part of sin we enter into a separation, for sin is basically alienation, an offense against God, and Hell is the place of the separated, who rule God out of their life. And every time you and I commit sin we are deserving of Hell. This, if you please, is justice.

But the God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is someone other than a God of justice. Justice, if you please, is always the minimum. God does not specialize in the minimum, He specializes in the maximum -- always the greater blessing, always, if you please, the better good. So Jesus told the story of the land-owner who said, every man is getting no less than what he bargained for, and what he considered just.

But I want to tell you about a God who is gracious, who is good, who is generous -- who will say to you, even though you deserve to go to Hell, when you are penitent He will forgive, He will deal graciously with you. There are many things, of course, that we can say about the nature of God. Whatever your list may be, don't forget to include that particularly precious thing called generosity. There just isn't any end to His goodness, and because of His essentially generous nature everyone stands to benefit by it.

Now there are two other ground-rules -- you haven't forgotten them, have you? Now that we've established how Jesus means this parable to be

interpreted, how does it apply to my situation? God has put us to deal with other people -- we are by nature social -- Jesus Christ meant us to be social creatures. How can we best live with one another?

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The ground-rule for the Christian is to be as generous with one another, not always dealing with the barest possible relationship, not always concerning ourselves with the minimum, but if at all possible, to be as generous with one another as we want God to be generous with us. And this is not easy. There is the kind of human being, and perhaps you could be that kind of human being, who having been defrauded, who having been short-changed, prays for the day when judgment will come and justice will be meted out, that the man who defrauded you will be dealt with justly. You don't have to pray for that, my friend -- that day will come. You don't have to set your thought on it, lest in the setting of your thought upon it you become bitter and cynical, and your sin could be worse than the sin of the man who defrauded you by ruling out for that person any hope except that he be meted justice.

In my relationship with people (I take you now into the confessional of my own soul) -- the longer I live, I'm not praying for justice, I'm praying for mercy, that in the time of Judgment God will not deal with me upon my desert, but I shall lean upon His mercy.

And the third ground-rule? -- -- to do something about the truth that's made applicable to your life....now. There's no better time by which to be generous than now. Today could be the only day that you have.

I want to conclude this sermon by sharing with you a very simple story that one of our staff members delights in repeating. It's the kind of a story that can afford repetition, lest we too soon forget its lesson.

.....parked in front of a man's house was a brand new automobile, a very

fine automobile. Two men came down the street. One man had inside information about that automobile, and he said to his companion, "Do you see it? - - the man who lives in there - he has a brother. His brother gave it to him!"

And the other man reacted, not as you and I might have reacted - - he reacted ever so magnificently, and he said, "I wish that I could be a brother like that."

Don't let your eye be evil because other people are good.

Don't let Jesus Christ ever say to you, reflecting the words of the land-owner: "Do you begrudge me my generosity?"

Don't ever let God be anything less than the God He wants to be - -
generous.

Don't ever let yourself be anything less than the person that God wants you to be - -

generous.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"IN AN HONEST AND GOOD HEART" Luke 8:15)
(- and always there are those who reward patience)

The sermon bearing the title "In An Honest and Good Heart" is based upon the Gospel for the Day; and the text is the 15th verse of the 8th chapter of Luke:

"But that on the good ground are they,
which in an honest and good heart,
having heard the word, keep it, and
bring forth fruit with patience."

There are three words that you ought to associate with this parable. The parable is the story of the seed, the soils, the sower. The three words: responsibility.....patience.....victory. Let us take each word in turn.

Whatever else you may think about this story that Jesus told, He is spelling out very clearly, once and forever as far as His disciples should be concerned, that the responsible person, as far as a sermon is concerned, is not only the preacher but also the listener. For essentially this is a parable of soils, not primarily of the sowing of seed, the sower or the seed itself, but the ground into which the seed is scattered.

Make no mistake about it, he who preaches the Word recognizes the responsibility thrust upon him. When we were ordained as ministers of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ we made a promise to preach the Word. This, we were told, is our great responsibility, to be the messengers of God's Truth. Never underestimate the importance of the spoken word. There are people whose lives have been changed by what they have happened to have heard. There are some people, perhaps not as large a number as we should wish, who have marked the path that leads to God's House, and when the preacher stood up, standing

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behind the sacred desk, and said, "This is the message of the Lord - - this is God's Word to you", their lives have never again been the same. In the plan of God, utmost importance is placed upon the proclamation, the speaking, the preaching, the teaching of the Word. No matter how much you may be impressed by the performance of the miracles, you must recognize the truth that when you read the New Testament the greater part of the time of our Lord was spent in preaching and in teaching. So whoever stands behind a sacred desk recognizes the great responsibility which is his to preach and to proclaim.

It's not a small matter that you yourselves should come today. This is not vanity in the heart of any preacher that prompts him to analyze it in this way: that here you have a solid week, and out of the entire week you take one hour, and you come, and in the course of that hour you give, presumably, undivided attention to one person as he stands in the pulpit and preaches. This is no small matter. And God have mercy, God have pity upon the preacher who does not recognize at once how important is his privilege as well as his task.

Fortunate indeed is the preacher who has a congregation that understands how important it is that he have time for the preparation of the sermon. It may be the most important thing that he would be doing in the course of the week. It was on Tuesday evening when I had dinner with a gentleman seated across the table. For a number of years he has been president of the official board of his congregation in New York City. It's his parish that has provided the church, perhaps, with our shining lights in the pulpit. Name any of our great pulpiteers, spokesmen for God, excellent sermonizers, and invariably at some point or another the Pastor of Holy Trinity Church in New York City would be mentioned. For twenty years Paul Scherer was the Pastor and the beloved

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preacher of that congregation. He told his friend, the member of the church council, that he spent at least two hours on each minute of a twenty-minute sermon - - a forty-hour week spent in the preparation of the sermon to be preached on any given Sunday morning.....so high a premium did he place upon the desired and necessary time, that he might not fail his people in the proclamation of the truth. Now this is the point at which we begin in this sermon: every preacher must recognize the responsibility thrust upon him to preach effectively earnestly and with compassion.

But then, says Jesus Christ, the people who listen to a sermon must recognize their responsibility. That's why this is essentially not a parable of the sower, and not even a parable of the seed, but basically it is a parable of soils - - the responsiveness which is given to the seed as it's scattered. So the greatest of all preachers is saying to people, "Don't you forget how great is your responsibility when a sermon has been preached, that you should listen to it effectively and in earnest."....and I as your Pastor say to you, don't ever underestimate the importance of what you bring to the preaching of a sermon - - your receptive mind, your willingness to be taught, the desire of your heart that some good thing might be spoken to you. No matter how you may look at this parable, then, this is the first word that you have to write down, the key word responsibility. The sower of the seed had to go out - - this was his task; the soils that received the seed were held responsible for the return that they gave.

The second key word in the understanding of this parable is the word patience. When you travel in the Near East it's not at all unusual to find people who do all kinds of tricks. They make their living that way, entertaining people with the magician's stunts. Travelers in the Near East have told me

about this chap that they encountered one time. He gets together a group of people, they promise to pay him a certain sum, once he has performed his trick, and then this is the trick that he specializes in: he takes a crock, or a container, in which he puts plain ordinary earth. You can see him gather the earth in front of you, you can see what was at the very beginning the empty container. And then in front of you, right in front of your eyes, he takes a seed and he puts that seed into this crock of earth. He has an old dirty cloth that he puts over the crock, he says a few words, and then he pulls the cloth aside....and right there, instantaneously almost, is a shoot of a tender plant, about one-half inch in height - - as quickly as all that! And then while you stand there spellbound, two or three times in turn he does the same thing all over again, until in the course of about fifteen minutes you have in front of you a plant that's a foot or more in height, and even with some side shoots. You pay your money....you've been entertained....you have been delighted. Of course it's a trick!....and you can't possibly figure out what's happened, but it's a trick. But you have been entertained and you have been fascinated.

But it is all contrary to nature. Nature just doesn't work that quickly.

There are those, I am told, who become impressed with the Christian Church because they always want God to work quickly. They read about Jesus Christ and they call Him the performer of miracles, and so therefore the picture of Jesus that they always want is the snapping of the divine finger - - "presto - change" ...and if action isn't always coming as quickly as this, then they lose interest, just as you would lose interest in this trickster, who when he no longer performs miracles, you no longer pay your money, and you no longer will be attracted to him.

There are those who tell me that there people who fall away from the Chris-

ian Church, once they have been attracted to it, and once they have been attracted to the Christian religion, but then something happens....they don't get their results as quickly as they should like to have had them. They always want God to work the miracle immediately. That's why, a strange way to put it, some of us get impatient with those who get impatient with us. God does deal with the supernatural, Jesus Christ did perform His miracles, but God's preferred method is always in the natural processes of life. God works in and through nature. There are some things that, even God says, may take a little time, not simply a little doing, but also a little time. And it could be that when He spoke this parable He had His disciples in mind particularly. No matter how great the multitude might be, He always had His eye focused somehow on this band of disciples, that they might not miss what He was trying to say.....because they had reached the place, now, where they were getting a bit impatient....."My goodness, Jesus, you have been about the preaching, now, for two and one-half years - - we've gotten you one multitude after another, we've gotten you, presumably, a favorable hearing...but where is this kingdom you have been talking about? Why don't we see these wonderful results always and everywhere? And Jesus, how is it with you? - - they've even driven you from the synagogues...in many a community you're a persona non grata! - - "

.....they were becoming impatient.

Well God didn't send Jesus into the world just to snap His finger constantly and let miracles drop full-fashioned from Heaven every hour of the day. So Jesus, in the preaching of this parable, says, it takes time....the seed must germinate, then all the forces of nature must come into play, and the natural process involves time until the harvest will come. This is what Jesus Christ is saying in this parable to you and to me.

Remember, He has to work with people like you and He has to work with peo-

ple like me. And sometimes it takes a little bit longer with some people than it takes with other people, just because they happen to be as natural as they are. In the parable of the soils, Jesus Christ the Master Preacher is talking about patience - - "It takes time....don't become impatient."

Who knows but perhaps this is the most difficult lesson we have to learn, especially those of us who are of the West. I shudder, sometimes, when I think how trigger-happy some of us can be in the West with those of the East. Their ways may not be our ways, they may be far more willing to take the due process of time. And I'm now speaking about political as well as economic and social issues. Somewhere in India last year I read this statement in a book, that the ground of the Orient is covered with the graves of the white man who tried to hurry the East. This may be typical of Western man, it's also typical of those of us who are impressed with the miracles that God can perform and become impatient with when He doesn't perform them every hour on the hour. God still spends the greater part of His time, figuratively speaking, working naturally.

The third key word from this parable....first responsibility...second patience - - - now victory. Remember what He said? The man went out to sow his seed. He got so little return, but he did get his return. That sower that Jesus talked about in His parable of the seeds and the soils surely was an undiscouragable chap. He really wasted or lost most of the seed. In fact, there are those who figure out that he got a return from only ten to twenty-five per cent of the seed that he sowed, but he got his return. That's the important thing. There was ground that was productive.

Now don't ask me to answer for you how it is that some people respond and others do not. This I cannot tell you. I cannot tell you why some of you are more spiritually sensitive than other people. I only know that this happens to

C be a fact of life. But over and above that I also know that because he may have wasted seventy-five per cent of his seed, this did not give him the option of not going out and sowing at all. The farmer still goes out and sows. The preacher still goes out and speaks the good word for Jesus Christ, anywhere and everywhere, and you never can quite tell, when you look at a human being, whether he's going to be productive or unproductive, responsive or unresponsive....you never can quite tell.

O But each of us is in duty bound to pass the good word along, to share the Truth....anywhere....everywhere....and always so. Because ultimately there will be the response, patience does bring its reward. And this is what you and I must remember. Be realistic, my friend, even as Jesus Christ was realistic. Once He preached to five thousand people.....on the night of His betrayal there wasn't a single person around.

P But He is the great undiscouragable one, and after the Resurrection He came back, and began all over again....."Peter, you denied me, but I come back to you, Peter, because there will always be a harvest - - "and Christians of all people have a right to be classified as the divine optimists. There will always be a return. You may fail in the meantime, but there is always a harvest for Heaven.....and you and I can be part of it.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"A STUDY IN TEMPTATION"
(- no man escapes temptation)

Text: Matthew 4:1-11

C The sermon, based upon the Gospel for the Day, bears the title, "A Study in Temptation" and the text could be the first verse in the 4th chapter of Matthew:

"Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit
into the wilderness to be tempted
of the devil."

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P This account, these eleven verses in the fourth chapter of Matthew, is essentially autobiographical. It's what happened in one man's soul. We would never know it if we had not been told. Jesus Christ was alone in the wilderness, for forty days and forty nights He did battle with the devil. Why did He tell us? Why did He want us to know? Again let me say to you, we would never have known if He had not told us.

Y Well the point at which we must begin is always the same: God loves us, and whatever He does to us, whatever He does for us, whatever He allows to happen to us, He does because He loves us. He shares this account with His disciples and with us because He loves us.

He to whom this happened was clothed with humanity. We are human. In a certain sense it can be put this way - - it's one man showing his battle scars to another, that in the showing of those battle scars the person who sees them might be better equipped when he has to enter the arena, that he might know where he could be hit, that he might know something of the attack of the aggressor.

We Christians dare not afford to make certain mistakes. One mistake we cannot allow ourselves to make is to deny Jesus Christ His humanity. Temptation is something that happens to a human being. Dare we believe that there is no temptation in Heaven? - - but here on earth there is temptation. We shall lose a great deal if we allow ourselves to see Jesus Christ as only God, never clothed in human form.

Now I'll grant you, it's a lot easier to handle a God who is remotely put in Heaven....it's a lot easier to do business with a God who is way out there....it's a lot easier to believe that Jesus Christ never walked this human road, because then, you see, when we're caught in the thick of it, and we succumb, we can say to God - - "You wouldn't quite understand, because You've never been human - - "we could say to God, "You don't know what it is to be tempted! - - therefore please excuse us when we fail."

....but God came to us in Christ, clothed with humanity. And then there was this episode in His life when He went up into the wilderness, for forty days and nights tempted, doing battle against the devil, alone in the arena of temptation.....

And He withstood the devil. And then this God in Christ comes to us and He says, "I know what you have to face. There is no temptation that comes to you that has not come to me - - look! - - look what I did - - look how I handled it." Ah, it's different when God speaks to you like that! - - because now God says, "I do understand!" God also says, " - By Christ's example you can see that it's possible to withstand the devil."

Man wasn't meant to be the servant of Satan. Man wasn't meant to go to hell. Whatever you do, don't sell Jesus Christ short and deny Him His humanity. He who went up into the wilderness was tempted even as we are tempted. This must be reckoned with at once.

The second thing is this: that when He went into the arena of temptation He went in alone. Temptation is always a solitary experience. You're never tempted by proxy. Just as no man can send somebody else to represent him before Christ and get entrance in Heaven in your behalf, just so you can't send anybody else to do battle against the devil in your name. It's always a personal encounter, and it's always done in solitary fashion.

I say very quickly to you, recognize at once that Jesus Christ did not escape temptation. If He didn't escape it, why do you and I think we might be able to escape it? Grateful as I am for what I was taught, as I was nurtured in the faith by those who dealt so graciously with me as a child of God, I resent, however, to this day, that somewhere, somehow along the line it was never brought home to me that I'd have to do business with the devil. That first encounter came as quite a shock. It's a healthy thing to recognize the truth, that the believer must do business with the devil - - not as his partner - - it's meant that he should be encountered by him.

And the devil is a very persistent thing. He'll never let you alone. It is not right to believe that this was the only temptation experience that Jesus ever had. As He began His ministry there was the temptation experience in the wilderness.....but you must remember that Jesus also said to His disciples, with true appreciation for what they had come to mean to Him: "Ye are they who have continued with me in my temptation"you who read the Good Book know very well that He had one temptation after another, and even to the very end - - what do you call Gethsemane, if you don't call it a place of temptation?

So in this study of temptation on this day I beg you to recognize at once that temptation will be your lot - - you have no choice. And this may frighten

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you, this may even shock you - - but God allows it - - God permits it - - boldly I say, it's even part of His plan for your life! And if you really want to be shocked, it's a requirement! But wait! You have to have a healthy appreciation for that word temptation. When God permits, when God allows, when God requires, it is never to entice, it is never to seduce, it is never to make it easy for you to sin. God wills that every man should be saved and God's not about to make it easy for any man to go to hell.

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But what, then, in the Christian understanding, is this word temptation? Basically, essentially, it's testing. And if you would have listened carefully when the Old Testament lesson was being read, that very startling experience that you and I sometimes can't quite understand - - "then God saw fit to test Abraham" - - in the old translation they used to say tempt. Temptation for the Christian is a time of testing.

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Now recognize at once when this experience took place. Some of the Gospel writers say that it took place immediately after He had been baptized, the sign and seal of God's favor, divine imprimatur, placed upon Jesus Christ - - "He's my man" echoes the voice from Heaven...

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...and immediately this clever, alert, aggressive devil stalks after Jesus Christ, and puts Him to the test. Don't ever forget it, the second most powerful force in the world, the force most powerful, next to God, is the devil. And anything that's as powerful as being next to the power of God is a mighty powerful force. So Jesus Christ was led up into the wilderness to be put to the test. All that God had in mind for you and for me, the most precious and the most effective thing that God could ever work in your behalf for the salvation of your soul, is at stake. It all hinges on Jesus Christ. Therefore He must be put to the test.

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In that world-girdling venture of a year ago, ever so often when I sat down in the flying craft I thought to myself, how greatly we are indebted to that countless number of people who test, that you and I might experience safety.....who take the craft on its initial flight - - every piece of metal that's allowed so much stress and strain, that it might be proven strong enough to accomplish its task. So God allows the devil to put Jesus Christ to the test.

Now in this study of temptation, notice how the test occurs. The devil is very, very clever - - he never wastes time. And if he's after you, you may rest assured that you have something priceless in your make-up.....and when he makes his attack, invariably it's in the thing that means most to you. As an example, with Jesus Christ:

Attack Number One...."Jesus, change stones into bread!"

....Jesus had His dream for a great society. Son of a poor carpenter, He knew what it was to live in an economically depressed area....the hordes of people who came out to hear Him preach were numbered among the unemployed. He knew what happens when men are hungry. He wanted to do good. He wanted to meet their needs: - -

you remember when He gave His blue-print for His life work:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me - - " and then He

goes on to say what He intended to do.....

"Jesus, you want the hungry to be fed - - try it my way!" Ah, there you have it! This is always the real test - - to do something God's way....or the devil's. It's as simple as that.

"All right, Jesus, you want people to recognize you as Lord and

Master - - you want a following because you believe you have some-

thing to offer people - - throw yourself down!"

....of course He wanted people to follow Him....of course He
wanted their allegiance - - here's the test! Will it be
God's way - - or the devil's?

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This is the devil for you. Rid your mind of the notion that he wears tails,
has a red suit, carries a pronged fork - - to encounter anyone like that,
you'd run! He always comes in a most attractive guise! - - always talking
to you about the things that are precious to you. Would you believe me,
that even when you come to a church service, if perchance you could be a
sensitive soul, with a hunger for and a thirst for an awareness of God - -
- even the devil can raise up distracting and irritating things, annoying
things that could so easily beset you, so that the very thing that you want,
you don't receive. He's as clever as that!

What we really need is a healthy understanding of that word temptation.
For the believer, temptation is not something which is meant to make us to
sin. What, then, is temptation, from the Christian point of view? Is it
not chiefly the time of testing? - - when it is made clear that while no
man can escape it, he can, in and by the power of God, withstand it. It is
meant, if you'll pardon the expression, to prove that man can have a shining
hour - - to reveal not so much man's weakness but his God-given strength!

Ah, but I have one thing yet to tell you, two things. The devil is a
very clever one - - I told you that before. Let me tell you now just how
clever he is. He always hits where he can make his greatest impact and
claim his victim, so subtle is he. It's an old, old story, supposed to have
happened in the Libyan desert.....somebody came upon a bunch of fiends,
that's what they were, who had found a holy man.....and they had great sport

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in testing him, trying to break him, trying to destroy that serene look upon his face, that precious awareness of God. So they devised all kinds of cruel torment. Still unbroken, still a face of serenity. They even tried theological arguments, thinking that they could outwit him. And then the devil himself came and he said to his cohorts, the fiends, "You're too crude.....let me have a chance at him."

.....and then the devil came and said to the holy man, "Have you heard the news? - - your brother has just been made Bishop of Alexandria!"

....and immediately the scowl of malignant jealousy came across that otherwise serene face. The devil knows your weak spot. Whatever secrets there are about you, there are two people who hold them - - God, and the devil.

Now the final word. Jesus withstood the tempter. He was triumphant, He was victorious, because He did not face the tempter simply as a human being. He relied completely upon the power and the strength of God.

And now Jesus is saying to you and to me, "This is what God did for Me - - - let Him do the same for you."

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"A STUDY IN FAITH" (Matthew 15:21-28)
(- - faith is never without obstacles)

The sermon entitled, "A Study in Faith" is based upon the Gospel for today, and the text is the 28th verse of the 15th chapter of Matthew:

"Then Jesus answered and said unto her,
O woman, great is thy faith: be it
unto thee even as thou wilt. And her
daughter was made whole from that very
hour."

We might as well begin by what you are probably thinking, probably thinking, that is, if you've given this passage of Scripture more than ordinary attention; for whenever you do this, in all likelihood you will say to yourself, it's not a very easy passage of Scripture to understand. In fact, there are few passages in the Bible more difficult than this one to fully appreciate, at least at first reading.

In case you don't quite remember it, let me recall it for you.

Our good Lord was nearing the end of His ministry. He had seen fit to withdraw, so He headed for a place beyond the borders of Palestine, where He might have a measure of peace and quiet....where for a season at least, He could have one final opportunity to impress clearly upon the minds of His disciples just why He had come into this world, what His mission was, what things were yet to occur, and how they might be able to face them. It would also give Him a chance for a kind of retreat, that is, a time to gather the necessary desired strength, to the end that He might persevere with patience, all the way to Jerusalem and to Calvary.

While He was there, however, hoping that His would be the opportunity to be away from the press of people, hoping, now, that the hostility of the

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scribes and the Pharisees wouldn't touch Him, hoping, now, that, at least for a season, the popular response to His Gospel might give Him a brief respite, that strength could be renewed.....but while He was there, lo and behold, a woman came - - not a Jewess, a Canaanitish woman, and she cried out, having seen Jesus Christ, for mercy. She kept crying out - - she is the personification of Persistence. Now this is where the passage of Scripture is difficult to understand - - "Lord, help me!"

....and He answered her not a word.

You see, we're not accustomed to a silent Christ. This is not the popular picture that we have of Him....one who could treat a plea for mercy with indifference.....and then to discover that it was the disciple band who came and said, "Jesus, pay some attention to her - - Jesus, do something!"and He said something about, "I haven't come except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel - - "

...did you get that? - - Jesus saying, "I haven't come except for the lost sheep of the house of Israel" - - !

It's one thing to recognize a silent Christ.

But can there be a discriminating Christ? Can there be a Christ who would allow any single human being to say somebody has priority over you? - - - - somebody else, at the moment at least, is more important than you?

....you see, this is why it's difficult to appreciate, at first glance, this passage of Scripture, because none of us can allow himself the liberty of cutting out the passages that we can't quite understand, taking a pencil and blotting them out. The incident remains, and there's the word of it, and presumably these are the words of Christ....the silent Christ....the Christ who discriminates.

And if that doesn't shake you, when the woman came back again and said, "Even dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from the master's table," having heard Him say to her, "It's not meet to take bread and cast it to dogs".....
.....a silent Christ?

....a discriminating Christ?

.....and now a Christ who humiliates a poor distraught woman?
This is why it's not easy to understand.

But I warn you, Scripture was never meant to be read casually. Scripture was never meant that you might receive its fullest meaning by a cursory glance. Scripture was meant to be read carefully, and that's why I can say to you now with the utmost of confidence, some stories are to be remembered, not by the way they began but by the way they ended. Here's where you have to concentrate your attention now. Jesus did say to her, "O woman, great is thy faith".....He did compliment her. Jesus did work a miracle in her behalf. Everything she wanted she got! This is what you have to remember.

We must never, never forget that Jesus Christ is never less than Jesus Christ. He is never less than God. He is the personification of Love, divine love, and He is always inclined to deal graciously with us. This is the constant picture of Christ that you must have, and even though you may be temporarily confronted by this Christ who is silent, by this Christ who seemingly discriminates, by this Christ who stalls and hesitates....He is never less than God....never less than good.....never less than gracious. It's the way the story ends that matters. He did say, "Your faith is great - - you'll get what you desire - - your daughter is made whole."

But why can't we look at this quite objectively, why can't we look at it quite realistically? Let's look, now, at what was at stake. First of all,

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you never get Jesus Christ performing a miracle because you happen to snap your fingers. You just don't pressure God. You just don't force His hand. That's one thing to recognize. Just because you cry out once, you may not always have the assurance that God is going to jump. That's putting it quite bluntly, but that's speaking the language that some of you can understand, because all too often that's the kind of attitude that you bring to God. He just isn't that kind of God, who moves and acts because man snaps his finger.

The second thing we have to recognize is this: that as far as this woman is concerned, it had to be clearly established that whatever she would get she would get on the basis of her faith. Faith is always the necessary ground-work for miracles, and God puts a high price upon His love, He values it greatly, and He's not about to squander it...and that's the thing the disciples had to learn on this particular occasion. The disciples came and wanted Jesus Christ to perform a miracle in behalf of this woman because they were sick and tired of her crying. The God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ just doesn't treat us graciously because He wants to shut us up! This was the point at which the disciples were willing to settle....she was proving herself a nuisance, irritating and annoying.....

..."Go on, Jesus, give her some kind of heed, that will quiet her and will get her out of our way - -"

...the disciples had to know that God doesn't work miracles on that basis! He's not interested in just quieting us. There's more involved than that.

And as far as this woman is concerned, it was her faith that had been awakened. Again, you're not forgetting she was not a Jewess, she was a Canaanite woman. What did she really know about God? What did she really

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know about Jesus Christ? Whatever else, the miracle could not be performed simply on hearsay. You know, of course you do, that what she knew about Jesus Christ she had heard from other people. This was the first time that He had ever gotten into that territory. God is not about to do something for you just on the basis of what you've heard from somebody else. I am not minimizing the importance of spreading the Word....to the day that I die I hope God will give me the strength and purpose of mind and heart, to go on speaking the good word in His behalf.....but it's never enough for you to stand in God's presence relying simply upon what you have heard from somebody else. You can't have God's miracle performed in your behalf as you write it off in somebody else's name! Faith must always be this personal involvement. Hearsay may be the first step, but it's never quite enough. So this had to be established clearly in this woman's mind, that her faith had to be personal, for this is part of the necessary groundwork when the miracle is going to be performed.

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Then it had to be clearly established that the element of superstition was not present. Anybody who has traveled in the East -- Far East, Middle East, Near East.....there's always a holy man, the itinerant one....he attracts a crowd. And there are those who think that maybe if they could just get near him, touch the hem of his garment, virtue will go out of him, a miracle will be performed. This gets dangerously into the area of superstition. Jesus had to make sure that this woman's faith was something more than superstitious belief.

This shouldn't be hard for you to understand. It's true for many people in our day. They try everything else under the sun. And then when the

going gets so tough, they say, "Well maybe you're right, preacher-man, maybe you have a point! - - I've tried everything else - " (and then to use the jargon of the day) - - "I might as well give God a twirl, too....what have I to lose?"

....there are people who come into God's presence just like that.

Well God isn't just about to work a miracle. Grace is too precious a thing, just to become a display of His power. So true faith had to be awakened in this woman. That's why, if you please, deliberately He hesitates, deliberately He stalls, until there could be clearly established that this woman's faith was virile enough to warrant a miracle.

Two things stand out brilliantly.

She came to Him in faith because of her love for her child. She was persistent, not for herself, but for her child. It's always a precious thing in God's sight when you come begging for something, not for yourself, but simply on the grounds of love. I am wondering if there's anything in God's sight quite as precious as when you keep talking to Him about somebody else - -

- - "not a blessing for me, but a blessing for her - "

...this is the kind of faith that God rewards - - the persistence that's born of a concern for somebody else.

And the second thing that stands out so brilliantly....the insistence on the part of this woman that Jesus Christ was able to help. There is to be no deterrent whatsoever, no matter what He might say, no matter what He did not say....she still believed that this One and this One alone was able to help her. This is an exceedingly precious thing! - - to the end that you stand with complete abandon - - "only you, God....only you - - that's why

I keep coming back to you! There's none to whom I can

go except you - - "

...so Jesus Christ stands His ground. So He waits until these two elements, so necessary in faith, are clearly seen. Then it is that He speaks to her,

"Woman, your faith is great"

...then the miracle can be performed.

You always have to remember the way the story ends.

Now faith is seldom if ever without obstacles. And furthermore, some of those so-called hindrances may be permitted by God. (I'll grant you, that's not much comfort for the frail-hearted). Yet how could it be otherwise? God works best among the stout and the stalwart ones who prove their strength by their willingness to face the obstacle course and to keep coming back again and ever so often. God delights in awakening faith in you, because it's only when faith is present that He can work His perfect work.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Remarks made by Pastor Shaheen
during the announcement period
on Sunday, March 14, 1965

As your Pastor, I am constrained to say to you what I am about to say:

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The events of the past week and more, especially as accented in Selma, should try the soul of every one of us. No matter what your own personal feeling may be toward pressure groups, no matter what your basic philosophy may be of Federal intervention (I am using all of these things, now, in quotes)....no matter what you may think of civil disobedience,man's inhumanity to man ought never to be treated with indifference.

None of us can become ostrich-like and pretend that he has not seen that he has not heard, that he does not know. It is not for me to tell the President of the United States what he should do. It is not for me even to urge him to go to Selma and to march at the head of the group. It is not for me to tell you what you should do.

But as your Pastor, as the shepherd and Bishop of your souls, I am constrained to urge you to write your representative, to write even the President, and to urge that all possible speed be given to whatever it is that is necessary to guarantee rights for those who are being abused or denied them.

As your Pastor, I urge you to pray for our President, that he may have wisdom to act in our behalf, to see that what is constitutionally guaranteed is made known. I keep being haunted by a phrase.....any man, anywhere, whatever his condition or circumstance, should never be treated as anything less than a man.

"A STUDY IN REALITY"

(- the facts of life always include
obedience)

Text: "But he said, Yea rather, blessed
are they that hear the word of
God, and keep it - - " (Luke 11:28)

It was true for our blessed Lord even as it is for us, that there are some days better than others. This was one of those times in the life of our Master when the day was not quite as good. An irritating handful had endeavored on every hand to catch Him off-guard and to unsettle Him. They even knew a measure of delight in engaging Him in an argument.

He was, of course, the perfect one, never unduly vexed. He was forever equal to any occasion and to anyone at any time and anywhere.

They had a chance to have their say. He answered them. Then there was silence. Depending upon your point of view - - it was either awkward or it was awesome. There were those who didn't quite understand what He had said to them. And they weren't quite sure what they could say next. Awkwardly, they remained speechless. On the other hand, there were those who understood all too well what He was trying to say. Awe-struck, they were speechless.

Then someone spoke. It was the shout of a woman. She had been impressed by the majesty and the grandeur of Jesus Christ and she shouted her words about what a wonderful thing it must be to have a son like Him. You know how the Biblical language puts it - - "blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts which you sucked!"

It was an emotional outburst, that's what it was. Undoubtedly, too, one of the grandest things ever to be said to Jesus. But there's not so much as

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"Thank you, ma'am" from Him. Surely it wasn't because He didn't appreciate what she had said. It is always a heart-warming moment to have someone react enthusiastically, especially when you're being hard-pressed to get your point of view established. Who was the great man who observed that fortunate indeed is that teacher who finds in his class one responsive, one enthusiastic pupil. Emotion does have its place (that's one reason, at least, why we'll always have poets) and we'd be the poorer without them).

So the woman, whose name we were never told, cried out in uninhibited fashion to Jesus.

Let's go back a minute and notice what a grand thing she really had done in letting her voice be heard.

It had been an extremely hard half-day or so that they had been giving Jesus. Deliberately they had tried to embarrass Him. In their arguing with Him there were those who were inclined to think that they had outwitted Him in the debate, even though He continued to set the facts straight and to reply to them flawlessly. Then when the silence came she boldly shouted her tribute of praise.

Emotional? Yes. A reaction? Yes. Did it indicate whom she favored? Yes. Did it indicate her approval? Yes. Was our Lord pleased? We have reason to believe that it meant much to hear these words. Nonetheless, He spoke rather sternly to her in return. You see -- we have little reason to believe that our Lord was much impressed by people who could be easily swept off their feet! While He was forever grateful for those who with enthusiasm responded to Him and to His way, He never encouraged emotion at the expense of obedience. The hard facts of Life always include the necessity of common, day-by-day faithfulness. This is the reason why He one day spoke rather severely to a woman

who shouted to Him one of the grandest greetings ever to fall on His ears.

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For her sake and for the sake of the disciples it had to be made quite plain that there must be something beyond emotion. You see, she ran the risk of thinking that once she had said what she had said, that everything was done that ought to be done. There are those who maintain that "the word's the thing". While it is true that there comes a time when the word has to be spoken -- the spoken word in itself is but the prelude to action. Our words naturally are meaningless until they are supported by our deeds. It may be poor poetry, but the point is clearly seen....."I know what you say may be true, but the test of your manhood is, what did you do?"

Let there be no misunderstanding. The moment of emotion is a grand and highly desirable thing and some of us would be starved without it. But we can never settle off permanently on the plateau of our feelings. A woman may cherish the moment when the man who claims her heart says to her for the first time "----I love you - ". But anyone with any sense of maturity at all knows that the words must be backed up with consistent day-by-day faithfulness.

Why do I make as much of this as I do today? Perhaps I can put it for you in this manner.....

Our coming, now, together in this place could be called an emotional response. Do we not sing the hymns because we are moved by adoration? o we not offer our prayers because we are constrained to do so out of a deep sense of need? And even for those of us who may be here habitually, there is the moment of emotional grandeur, when perchance we recal' with true regard those who in the early years of our life taught us the meaning of the Lord's Day and the necessity to assemble with the faithful. I would not in any way speak dispar-

gingly of the emotional aspect of this worship experience. Do I not confess to you that before I come to this sacred desk I pray that God would give me the baptism of the Spirit, that with fervor this Gospel should be proclaimed? And do we not encourage those who read the liturgy to do so with true feeling and sensitivity of spirit?

But I warn you, we must never for a moment think we have done our religious duty by simply singing hymns, offering prayers, listening to a sermon or "going to church" as though this was all that God needed from us. One thinks oftentimes of Lynn Harold Hough's 'little old lady in lavender and lace.' He used to tell how on a Sunday morning she would go to her closet and get down her lavender and lace dress, and put it on, as pleased as punch, and trot away to divine worship. Once the church service was over, she trotted away just as pleased with herself, and went back home. The first thing she did was to take off her lavender and lace dress and hang it in the closet, where it stayed until next Lord's Day. Observed the preacher - - "and that's the way it was with her religion, too."

Whatever else you may think or say, no amount of fine feeling....no grand and good emotional expression.....can ever take the place of a faithful witness through our deeds.

With God the acid test is always obedience. Remember how our Christ once put it (Luke 6:46) - - "Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I command you?"

So, you see, there are these two words, emotion and obedience. They must be reckoned with. The text constrains us to do so.

It is only as we obey that faith itself has any meaning whatsoever. We are reminded of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, hero and martyr of the German Church who

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was executed in 1945, a few days before the camp in which he was held prisoner was liberated by the Allies - - - "Only he who believes is obedient, and only he who is obedient believes. It is quite unbiblical to hold the first proposition without the second - - for faith is only real when there is obedience, never without it, and faith only becomes faith in the act of obedience." How often our blessed Lord commanded men to do something in order that they might realize their faith. To the man with the withered hand He said - - "Arise, take up thy bed and go thy way". To the middle-aged paralytic at the pool He gave the order - - "Take up your bed and walk."

The very last recorded words of our blessed Lord to His disciples were not, "Let me hear you say it" but rather, "Go - - teach - - preach - - baptize." Isn't that as much as to say - - "Get on your way. Let me see what you can do."

Above all else there is the stern reminder - - the words of our Lord Himself - - "Not everyone that cometh unto me and saith Lord - - but he that doeth - -".

* * *

(from notes dictated by Pastor Shaheen
after the sermon was preached)

"A STUDY IN COMPASSION"

(- love always has enough with which to begin)

The sermon bearing the title, "A Study in Compassion" is based upon the Gospel for today; and the text, the 5th and 6th verses of the 6th chapter of John:

"When Jesus then lifted up his eyes, and saw a great company come unto him, he saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?
And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do."

It wasn't as though Jesus had deliberately tried to get away from people. Yet there had to be time when the disciples could receive His undivided attention. They, too, perhaps more than the others, had to be rooted and grounded in the faith, for they were the ones on whom He would depend after His earthly pilgrimage had been completed. They had to fully understand the meaning of His message and of His mission, which naturally meant every now and then He had to be alone with them, to give them a chance to evaluate, to ask questions, and for Him to ascertain just how far they were progressing in their understanding of the Kingdom.

And then, He had to have time for Himself. You just can't go on giving and giving and giving, without always setting aside a season when you are receiving, for you cannot give what you do not receive. So for Himself it was highly desirable and necessary that there would be the seasons when He could be away from people.

Maybe there was a third reason. The opposition, diabolical as it was, was increasing in strength....and presumably He tried to hold off as long as He could the all-out crisis.

Now you may give whatever priority you wish to any of these reasons - - put them all together....this is why you can read in the Scripture that Jesus withdrew from the multitude, He took a boat and He went to the other side of the lake.

But there were the people, seemingly all of Palestine's peasantry, observing Him, and utterly amazed at the kind of person that He was. So they watched closely - - they sent out their scouts - - "Where is he going now?"it was only after He was comfortably settled for perhaps a few minutes, when they came like droves, almost out of nowhere they descended upon Him.... ...they even traveled nine miles until they caught up with Him, if they had to take a round-about way, until they reached the spot where He was.

How do you suppose He might have felt?

For the moment at least, you can read into His life your own reaction: "What! - - can't I get away from them for only a minute? When will I ever have the chance to be alone with my disciples? Think what this will mean to that group of opponents - - won't they make much of this! They come upon me in hordes.....they follow me as a great company - - "

....whatever may have been your reaction, surely it would have been a reaction of impatience, and a desire to disclaim or to ignore them.

But here He is - - never less than Jesus Christ, which means that He is always the compassionate one....

...not saying to Himself, "It's their own fault - they shouldn't have come after me"

....not saying to Himself, "I didn't invite them....let them get along as best they can"

Immediately this compassionate Christ says - - "They must be hungry, they must be tired....they ought to be given a chance to sit down and rest....they ought to have something to eat."

....that's Jesus Christ for you. Always compassionate.

Always looking at you and first making a note of what it is that you need.

And then it was in that moment that He turned to Philip - - "Philip, how are we going to get bread to feed these people?" Would you like to do it? - - with a sanctified imagination, try to picture the look on Philip's face. Ordinarily it was blank, because they tell us he was a dull person. You know, of course you do, that Jesus had all kinds of people in that disciple company - - no two alike - - a variety. And how they must have tried His patience, how they must have gotten on each other's nerves. He was the one who drew them together. Well He turned to Philip, the most unlikely one of the disciples to be confronted - - "Philip, how are we going to get bread to feed them?"

And Philip might have turned to Jesus and said, "Why look at me?"...and then Jesus might have said, "Well, Philip, I'm looking at you for this reason: this is home territory for you, this is the part of the country from which you've come - - you know it better than anybody else." And then Philip simply replied, "Two hundred pennyworth of bread - - why, you can't even feed the people with that amount!".....as much as to say, "It's hopeless - - it's an impossible situation - - don't even think of trying to attempt a solution."

Well that's life for you. It's one thing to have a problem called to your attention. Maybe it could be said that there is a surprising number of people who go through life and never recognize a problem. If you want something to make you uncomfortable, for the second at least, maybe this may be one of the things that Jesus does when He comes into your life, cause you to

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see things that you hadn't seen before, and before He answers whatever problem it is that causes you the trouble, He may focus your attention, as you have never seen it before, upon the problem itself. Well there may be people who are never aware of the problem. Then there are also people who, once they are made aware of it, throw up their hands in holy horror and say, "Impossible! - - it's not worth the try."

But then there are always those, who with whatever spiritual sensitivity they have, see an opportunity to meet a need. And there, bless his soul, is where another disciple loomed upon the horizon - - Andrew. And Andrew might have said, "I don't know what it is, Jesus, that you're talking about to Philip, but did I hear you say something about bread? - and did I hear you say something about a multitude of people? Do you know what? - as I moved about among the people I found a little boy; he has some bread and he has some fishes - - would you like to have him, Jesus?"

....bless his soul, God be eternally thanked for the Andrews, who while they may not be able to make a complete survey of the situation, and think about a problem along enough until they may reach the place where they say nothing can be done, at least they're not going to say it in the beginning! They are so inclined to say, "Let's begin - - let's try to do something about it.

Mark you, Philip and Andrew were both disciples. They had both been in the company of Jesus Christ, both of them had been exposed to His life and to His spirit and to His teachings, and within that company of disciples you get two kinds of people, sharply pronounced now: one who says, "There isn't anything we can do".....and the other who says, "Let's try - - let's begin with what we have."

Perhaps we could reduce Saint Luke Church to this level, and say, as we ought to be able to say with ourselves, basically we are a company of disciples - - we are people who have been confronted by Jesus Christ - - we are people who walk with Him, who come to be taught by Him, to benefit by His spirit and His grace. And within Saint Luke Church - - do you want to do it now? - - you can find the two types

....among us there would be those, confronted by a problem,

who would say, "It's impossible - it's a foolhardy

notion even to think that you can do anything about it"

...and then within our company, whatever the problem may be, there are those who might say, "Sure we can! - - let's try! - - let's begin."

It may be the latter person who doesn't fully know all the facts involved.

But God does not depend upon people who know all the facts! God depends upon people who are willing to try - - who offer Him a measure of enthusiasm - who have the positive accent. These are the hopeful ones.

Then in that company, while we're talking about the personalities and the drama, this drama of compassion, you find, of course, Jesus Christ; you find, of course, Philip, Andrew.....but then there is a boy. Curious like all other boys, he was attracted by a crowd. Just like all other boys, his mother knew that he would get hungry, and so she packed a lunch for him. It was meager fare, mark you....they were almost sardine-size fish.....and the loaves? - - the cheapest kind of bread possible, barley loaves - eaten only by people who couldn't eat any other kind of bread because they couldn't afford any other kind of bread.....a barley loaf. (When a woman, who, taken in adultery, was in duty bound to confess her sins and to make amends, part of the thank-offering that she brought for her repentance was a piece of barley bread,

because barley was fed to beasts, and her sin was considered the sin of a beast).....that's how meager this fare was.

C But persuasive Andrew said, "Come along, let me introduce you to Jesus Christ." God be thanked always for those who introduce people to Jesus Christ, no matter how unpromising they may be. You know the great thrill of a Sunday School teacher, and you know the great thrill of a pastor is always introducing people to Jesus Christ, and you don't have to be a pastor or a Sunday School teacher to do it - - anyone who makes known to somebody else the fact of Christ is an introducer....

Oand when you introduce someone to Jesus Christ you never quite know how wonderfully it might turn out. They used to tell about the old German school-master who whenever he went into his classroom - he had a class of boys - he always bowed ceremoniously as the class period began, to these, his students...(ordinarily, you know, the students, according to European tradition, and there much to be said for it! - would stand up and bow when the school-master entered the classroom)...but here is the old German school-master, when he entered the class, bowed to his students. When he was asked why he did it, he simply said, "You never know what's in front of you, and how some of these boys may turn out." You could well believe that, because in his class was a boy named Martin Luther.

Y You never know, when you deal with somebody else's mind and spirit and life, what may come of it. This is one reason, isn't it, why the church makes so much of infant baptism, because there in the ceremony of infant baptism, when the Sacrament is being made available to a child, we allow the parents to understand in no uncertain manner that the mark of God is placed upon this child - - that this child belongs to the Kingdom, that this child was named for

Jesus Christ. And how a family's life could be transformed if the parents, every time they looked at their child, would think of that baptismal moment, saying to themselves, the child belongs to Jesus Christ. Again I say to you quickly, you never know what wonderful things will happen when you introduce someone to Jesus Christ.

It was little....he was only a lad, but he held in his hands the makings of a miracle. Now what he had wasn't much. Yet if it had been withheld, God would not have been able to do the wondrous thing that He did. The little, as every Sunday School scholar knows, became a lot and the miracle of the loaves and the fishes continues to fascinate us. But it isn't fascination that is intended by the miracle - - - it is encouragement - - - encouragement to use what we are and what we have where we are.....in God's name. Andrew could have said, "It's too insignificant." The little boy could have said, "It's worthless." But where love is present, we always have enough by which to begin. And a wise man once said that the longest journey in the world begins with the first step.

Jon brought home to us some time ago something that we've learned to treasure. It's the sound track of "Fiddler on the Roof". "Fiddler on the Roof" is the story of a devout Jew and his family who lived by tradition in Anataska, a town presumably in Siberia or Russia. The old man who is the head of the house was given to uttering pious things, and offering a homily every now and then with pronounced religious overtones, even though it might be according to his own understanding or desire. But one of the songs that he sings is "If I Were a Rich Man"....and then he tells all the things that he would do if he were a rich man. A number of years ago an English newspaper ran an interesting contest. They invited their readers to send in to them replies to this proposal: If you had five, ten, fifteen thousand pounds, which you don't have, what would

you do with it? (It's the same kind of thing, if I said to you, if you had a million dollars, how would you spend it?).....the editor was fascinated by some of the replies that came. But the one that meant most to him was this one - - it was a woman who said, "If I had this unexpected sum, which I now don't have, well I can tell you a number of things that I would do with it. One of them would be this, instead of giving one ounce of tobacco, now, to that man who lives on a meager old-age pension down the street, I'd give him four ounces of tobacco. That won a warm spot in the editor's heart, because, he said, here was a woman, who if she had more, would simply extend what she was already doing. You get the point, of course you do.

Several years ago in my catechetical class I used to say to the boys and girls, if you had five thousand dollars, how would you spend it? And then they answered on one side of the page. Then when the time wassup for that, I said, now there's a second question - turn the page please.....if I give you, now, five dollars, how would you spend it? There ought to be a correlation between the two.

Jesus recognized the problem: people had to be fed.

He looked around for anyone who might put into His hands whatever

it was that he had.....and as soon as that happened, you
had the makings of a miracle.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

April 4, 1965

"A STUDY IN DEFIANCE"

(- there comes a time when God Himself
defies those who stubbornly resist Him)

The sermon entitled, "A Study in Defiance" is based upon the Gospel
for the day; and the text is the 46th verse of the 8th chapter of John:

"Which of you convicteth me of sin? And
if I say the truth, why do ye not believe
me?"

It was not a day for politeness. In fact, had you been there, with
your gentle sensitivity, you would have blushed more than once; and chances
are you would have gone away hoping very quickly to forget what you had
heard and to try to blot out from your memory what you had seen.

It was really the first time that it happened quite like that.

Jesus became involved in argument. It was a heated argument, and they kept
coming at Him from all sides. They tried to outwit Him, and then when
their efforts were unsuccessful, the whole affair almost ended in a bloody
riot. They reached for the nearest thing at hand - - stones, and began to
throw away.

Now the language they used wasn't very pleasant. You can read it for
yourself. But chances are, due to familiarity, with the sacred page, it won't
make the dent on your mind that it ought to make. Permit me, then, to recite
for you now some of the words. I shan't try to make them sound as vehement
as they actually were. Such words as these were used....

"Liar - " - "Children of the devil- "

" - father of falsehood - " - "children of fornication - "

.....that's the kind of thing that was hurled back and forth.

And then if you want your sensitivity shocked for a little bit at least, our Blessed Lord was there.....and He was far from being the gentle Jesus, far from being meek and mild on that day of argument. A proud bunch, they came at Him with defiance, and they weren't about to believe in Him. Of that one thing they were quite certain, as they strutted themselves in front of Him. So He met them on their own ground. There does come a time when God Himself defies those who stubbornly refuse His truth, and poor miserable creature that man is, in the end all that he can do is reach for something and throw away, as though it were possible to beat Truth out of existence.

So Jesus looked at them. He said, "You lie".....He said, "You're the children of the devil"....

...that's what He said to them! And He argued with them, as they argued with Him, only there was one difference in the way they argued - - they argued primarily for argument's sake and they had no intention whatsoever to recognize a valid point. Shall I say it? - - He stooped to their level, hopefully to convince them, if you please, hopefully to put right there in front of them the crux of the matter. But they were not minded to believe. ...for man convinced against his will may be of the same opinion still....they weren't even to be convinced against their will - - that's one thing that they weren't going to allow to happen. And then, as though they had to prove their point, they picked up stones and began to throw away....and then Christ miraculously escaped, as though, if you please, even God maintains that 'he who fights and runs away may live to fight another day.'

But the time had not yet come, when the black day should occur. Oh, they'd come back at Him; they weren't to be shaken off that easily. They were not to be discouraged, and they kept stalking Him until one day when they would

come back, they would reach for something worse than stones. They had nails in their hands, and they had an instrument of torture, and they nailed Him to it....and then they walked away, still thinking, proud man that he is, that you can kill Truth, that you can beat it into the dust, and walk away.

So much for the beginning, so much for the conclusion of this sermon. For the beginning of this sermon is, you see, the day of heated argument. The conclusion of the sermon is that even though man does his worst, God remains triumphant. You just can't kill Truth.

Well now, what can we say about what lies in between? What shall we make of this tremendous fact?

Well here's one thing that you have to begin with, and it might be the only thing that you have to reckon with. There comes a time when God Himself defies those who would defy Him. There comes a time when Jesus Christ permits Himself to become involved. He who is the personification of Truth will not think that He can go away and give man just enough rope, and eventually he'll hang himself, as though there are some things that can just be taken care of naturally. As much as some of us, you and I, may wish to believe this, it just isn't true. There comes a moment of involvement, and Jesus Christ recognizes it as such, and He was not to be ostrich-like, either, as though He could pretend that man was not evil, as though He could pretend that man would not be as daringly wicked as he is....as though He could make Himself believe that there would not be such a thing as man's inhumanity to God! For that's what this is, it's a case of man's inhumanity to God! It's one thing to deal with man's inhumanity to man, but when you treat God as something less than even a human being - - - this is something that not even God will stand for. And as far as God is concerned, there comes a moment when the line has to be

drawn, and the enemy must be seen for what he is, and the crucial issue called by name.

And that's what happened on that terrible, unpleasant day, a day that wasn't meant for politeness.....

...in which He said, "You're a liar"

...in which He said, "You are the children of the devil"

.....in which He said, "Yours is the worst sin - -"

(if I may paraphrase it) - - "because yours is the sin of unbelief - - you don't want to believe."

And there He stands in front of them grandly and gloriously, sustained by a good conscience.

That's always a precious moment in a man's life, when he stands up so completely unafraid, when he stands up so sure and so certain of his cause....to the extent that Jesus Christ could say, "Who among you convicteth me of sin?" And that's why He allowed Himself to become involved - - because this was the issue at stake. God must be seen for what He is. Christ must never be reckoned with for anything less than what He actually is, the sinless One - - then He can be my Saviour! If He is not sinless, then I die without a Saviour. And soon or late the matter comes to this point: do I trust Him or don't I? do I believe Him or don't I? do I accept Him, or won't I? And that's why He stood there as defiantly as He did.

I shall say this, I admit, rather awkwardly, but let me attempt it. There's something to be said to their credit. It's a rather dubious thing to mark up in their behalf, but listen carefully. Whatever else you may say about them, this must be said - - they at least recognized the fact of God.... and they did make up their mind about Him. Hostile? Yes. Defy Him? Yes. And

all the while this was occurring they were paying attention to the fact that He existed. I do not pretend to be one who reads signs of the times adequately, but I am inclined to think that you can't always say this about modern man. For we are a people, you see, who run our lives as though God did not exist. This is the tragedy of our day!

Some time ago there was a group of people fortunate enough to engage the President of our Church, Dr. Franklin Clark Fry, in earnest conversation. It's always a prize moment when you can do that because he's so knowledgeable, and he is so sensitive to what's going on in all parts of the world. But in the course of the conversation somebody said, as they were thinking about all that had happened to the Cause of Christ in our day, within the span of your lifetime and mine!....our brethren in Europe who were persecuted for the Faith... ..Christians who in our day in European countries died because they would not give up their conviction in Christ, to say nothing of those in Asia who had been persecuted and tortured for the Faith....

....and this was the question that was put to Dr. Fry - - "Do you think the day will ever come when we in America will be treated in the same way - - persecuted because we are Christian?" He replied immediately, as he is wont to do, and there was an uncomfortable chuckle in his voice when he said, "Persecuted? No. Ignored? Yes." This is a lamentable thing. This could be our characterization, for people just won't pay any attention to us because we happen to be Christian. They just won't recognize the dent that we hope to make upon their lives...they just won't think that we matter that much! Our friend, now of blessed memory, T. S. Eliot, once wrote, "Man has left God - - not for other gods, they say, but for no god, and this has never happened before."

...at least on that day they took note of it, and defied Him.

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But I would like to say to you with all the ardor of my soul - - you just can't ignore Jesus Christ. He just won't be pushed away to the periphery of life. Like a photograph or a painting of the portrait of a man on the wall, His eyes will keep following you throughout this whole room which is light, and they're haunting eyes, and they can vex you, and they can disturb you....He just won't have done with you.

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And if you should choose it, these eyes will defy you....

....defy you to see Him as anything less than He is!

....defy you to see Him as anything less than He is, involved

with all the turmoil which is life itself, all of its evil,

all of its wickedness, all of its injustice.

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But there's one thing you have to say about Jesus Christ - - He can never be less than He is, and all that He is may haunt you, may defy you.

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But He doesn't prefer it that way. He prefers that you see in those eyes winsomeness, compassion - - the eyes that cause you to look at His arms, arms that are outstretched, beckoning you to Him, and saying, "Whoever will come!".....offering to you His heart and His hand.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"PALM SUNDAY REFLECTIONS"

The sermon for today bears the title, "Palm Sunday Reflections" and the text is from the Gospel for the day, the 6th and the 7th verses of the 21st chapter of Matthew:

"And the disciples went, and did as Jesus
commanded them,
And brought the ass, and the colt, and
put on them their clothes, and they set
him thereon."

That's just about the way that second verse ought to be read - - "and they set him thereon" - - because when you read it that way, you notice something that ought not to be overlooked, and that is specifically that the disciples had made up their minds that they were going to become involved with this triumphal entry into the Holy City of Jerusalem. It was not only that Jesus Christ himself had made the decision to enter, but now when they with their own hands lift Him up and put Him upon the beast, with perhaps, who knows, a gentle kind of push - - from that moment on they were definitely a part of what happened on Palm Sunday.

Throughout the whole Christian Church on this day there is this act of remembrance, because that's what essentially Palm Sunday is, a kind of remembrance of what happened, once upon a time, in that distant city. But you and I will not serve the cause aright if we simply look upon it as an act of remembrance. It must also be a time of identification. We must not only look back upon it, but we must say to ourselves as best we can, How can we identify ourselves with it?.....for mankind was there - - we are a part of mankind; the disciples were involved - - we pride ourselves in being named after Jesus Christ, and that numbers us in the disciple company. That means, then, we are involved.

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Let us go back now, take our rightful place, not as spectators but as participants in this Palm Sunday drama. Can you picture yourself lifting Jesus Christ bodily?...can you picture these hands of yours, putting Him there upon that beast, and then waving Him on, and saying, "Jesus Christ, you've made the right decision -- we agree with you -- and if we can't ride with you, we'll walk with you, and we'll join in the angelic chorus that must be reflected from heaven through our voices, 'Hosanna, Hosanna!'"

Well that's one way of approaching this act of remembrance which is Palm Sunday. Begin at that point, won't you? It was a day of decision. Jesus Christ had made the decision. The disciples had decided to agree with His decision. What was the decision He had made? This is it:

"I will go into Jerusalem. I will take the initiative.

I will force them to pay attention to me. If the crowds come clamoring after me, then they will of necessity have to ask the question, 'Who is this'?

....that's exactly what they did. You can read the Scripture page for yourself. They asked, "Who is this?" He initiated, then, the unfolding of this drama. This was the decision that He made.

Now it's not at all unusual that Jesus Christ should have reacted in that way. Up to this time, however, He had done what He could to keep from going into Jerusalem and forcing their hand. He would say to His disciples, "Not yet -- the time has not yet come"....and then He'd skirt Jerusalem, or He'd retreat. But today the die is cast. Palm Sunday, if it is anything, is D-Day, the making of a decision, the invasion of the holy city....

...not at all unusual that He should have reacted that way. This was simply the culmination of it, because when we read about the life of Christ we find that He was always confronting peo-

ple. He had a way of standing up directly in front of them, and forcing them to make up their minds what they were going to do about Him, and about His way. Whatever else Jesus Christ is, He is the one who encounters people, who haunts us, who, if we do not pay attention to Him, will force us to pay attention to Him. Look at all those other days....

.....there was Matthew at the seat of custom

- - and then one day there stood Jesus Christ, their eyes met...

...it was D-Day"Matthew, will you stay where you are,
or will you get up and follow me?"

.....one day Simon and the others were mending their nets - they were fishermen

- - and Jesus Christ comes into their lives, and there He stands,
confronting them....then they had to make the decision:

- would they go on mending their nets? - would they get up
and follow Him, and become fishers of men?

...always this Jesus Christ taking the initiative, stalking you, coming into your life, standing there....if you think you can ignore Him, He just won't let you ignore Him. Whatever we may do, no matter how we may order our lives, if we may mis-handle things, then He comes and forces us to decide whether or not we won't accept the better way....

.....there was Zacchaeus, the man who was up a tree in more ways than one

- - then one day Jesus Christ came to Jericho, and Jesus and Zacchaeus
sat down, and in the course of the conversation Zacchaeus knew
that he had to make up his mind....he would either go on mis-
handling his wealth, or he would decide in favor of Jesus Christ..

.....there was that woman at Samaria, as she went to draw water

- - there was Jesus Christ.....a woman who had been mis-handling

her sex.....and in that moment of confrontation with
Jesus Christ she had to decide - - she either went on the old
way, or she decided for Jesus Christ.

That's the way He is.

He is the one who confronts us, and now the time had come when He had to go
into Jerusalem. Now the Holy City had to see Him for what He was, and they
would have to make up their mind.

This, incidentally, is the thing that some of us detest, this having to
make a decision. Thomas Carlyle once said, "To live has always been a serious
thing"....and that's what makes life serious, the necessity to decide. Try as
we may, we may evade the issue, we may become ostrich-like and pretend that it
doesn't exist, then there does come a time - - "Once to every man and nation
comes the moment - - ".....it cannot be evaded.

If Thomas Carlyle should say, "To live has always been a serious thing"
...those of us who would practice the Christian Faith can easily say, then,
"To live the Christian life has always been a serious thing" - - so serious
that Jesus Christ himself said at the very beginning of the Christian life, it
must be an act of decision - - no man stumbles into discipleship - - no man
casually follows Jesus Christ. It is always an act of decision....

"If any man would come after me, let him deny himself - "

(and that always implies decision)

" - - and then follow me, follow me daily - - " says Jesus Christ.
Some decisions have to be made again and again, constantly confirmed. But don't
be annoyed with the thought of it. We develop character by the decisions that
we make. This is the characteristic trait of a mature person, the ability, the
wisdom by which he is willing to make the decision. They used to say something

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about a very colorful President of the United States, it was in your time and mine -- but no matter what you might have thought about him, you would have to say this, that once he made a decision he made it, having recognized the fact that a decision had to be made. It might be the wrong decision, it could be the right decision, but if a decision had to be made, then he would face it. So Jesus Christ, for your good and for my good, comes into our lives, and He waits there, hauntingly....." -- make up your mind -- decide."

You're not forgetting, are you, how the sermon began? Those disciples made up their mind -- "Jesus Christ, if you've decided to go into Jerusalem, we're going with you"...and they even with their own hands put Him upon the beast. That's involvement.

Now let it be said and said very quickly, that sometimes you and I may not fully understand the meaning of the decision that we make in the moment when we make it. It is only some time later on that our decision may be confirmed, but the important thing is the direction in which you look when you make your decision. Whether the disciples realized fully what they were doing, that I cannot say to you, I only know that when they made their decision that day, they were looking in the same direction as Jesus Christ. And this is enough by which to begin.

Now, what happens when Jesus Christ confronts you in the moment of decision? Only two things can happen, because the man is perfectly right who says down deep within the heart of every man there is either a throne, or there is a cross, and that's what man gives to Jesus Christ -- we either crown Him, or we crucify Him.....even to decide that we won't decide is to make a decision. Not to accept Him is to reject Him, and the authority for that statement is the word of Christ himself, "He who is not with me is against me."

And always there are these pressures of life - the decision must be made, and chances are the choice is limited to two:

...the right or the wrong

...the good or the bad

...the Christlike or the un-Christlike thing

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...and whether you've convinced yourself of this or not, listen to it carefully - - for the mind of the Christian, decisions essentially must be made on what he understands to be the more Christlike thing. Otherwise "he who would come after me" has no meaning whatsoever. For to come after Jesus Christ is to decide things according to His mind and according to His spirit.

Now when He entered Jerusalem, there they were, and they had to make up their mind. Who were the people of Jerusalem?

Well, there was a man named Pontius Pilate...

...and he represents all those who decide things on the basis of expediency...."if I have to make a decision concerning you, Jesus Christ, I'll make my decision on what I consider to be expedient - what seems to be the easy thing for the moment"
...so we wash our hands, and decide that way.

Then there were so-called religious people in Jerusalem, who had to make their decision...

...this upstart from Galilee, this itinerant preacher-prophet, this man who has come with certain brand-new notions about God, in conflict with the traditional point of view....they had to decide.

Then there were certain business men - they, too, had to make a decision...

....for this Jesus Christ, ere Palm Sunday would be ended, or the

following day, would go to the temple, and He'd drive out the money-changers....these business people had to make a decision...

"can we afford to allow Jesus Christ to interfere with our profit?"

Then there was the populace, the whole mass of people. They would have to make a decision....

...and they made their decision on the basis of an emotional reaction....somebody started up something about "Crucify! - - Crucify!"and they simply took up the call and the shout that somebody else had started. And that's the basis on which they made their decision.

Please don't forget how this sermon began.

The real meaning of Palm Sunday for you and for me can be known only as we identify ourselves with it, the mood and the people of that day. But now, you and I say, but it happened a long time ago, when Jesus entered the Holy City they had to make up their minds, and then, because they were sinful people, the story ended in Jerusalem with their crucifying Him...

...and back down deep in the recesses of our minds we say, "Those must have been terrible sins, that would drive a man to the cross - - they must have been terribly heinous and black - - sins that would do something as terrible as that!"

But believe me when I tell you, theirs was no extraordinary sin whatsoever! Every sin to which they reacted, by which they rejected Jesus Christ, is a sin that's known to you, and a sin that is known to me....

...every day of your life, every day of my life, we are prone to do things as a matter of expediency...not to trouble the waters overmuch, to keep everything as quiet as we possibly can, and to do the easy thing

at the moment. Is that a strange sin in your life? -- you know what you confess to Jesus Christ.

...and every time you and I refuse to accept some brand new concept of God, some fresh wind of truth, we commit the kind of sin that helped crucify Jesus Christ...it's so easy to keep Jesus Christ imprisoned in a stained-glass window...it's so easy to keep Him imprisoned in a traditional prayer of the church. But this was no ancient god with which they had to deal that day in Jerusalem. This was a contemporary Christ, who came into the center of their lives, in the very present moment. And every time you and I refuse to believe that God can speak directly to us, in this our day, we may commit a sin that was characteristic of them/

...and if this should make you uncomfortable, I cannot help it...He drove money-changers from the temple, because they put material gain above everything else.....and every time any man who takes the name of Jesus Christ makes a decision solely on the merit of material gain, keeping his eye only on his checkbook balance, that man is committing the kind of sin that helped crucify Jesus Christ.

They were not extraordinary sins.

They were your daily sins, and my daily sins.

And then on that lonely hill outside Calvary, there was the accumulation of all of them, they made their terrific impact together. He entered the Holy City triumphantly...but the entry was simply a prelude to failure, if you please, because the wickedness of man did have, and I say it very carefully, its moment of ascendancy. They made the wrong decision, and yet God never gave man anything more wonderful than when He said, "I'm going to let you decide." But God never meant for man to make the wrong decision. Yours is the power, not to crucify, but to crown Him with glory and with honor.

"LOVE'S REWARD"

The sermon for the day bears the title, "Love's Reward" and the text is one word, from the 28th chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew:

" - - Mary."

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God never forgets a name. God never forgets a face. God never forgets a need. God always rewards the soul that cries out after Him. This, honestly now, is the meaning of Easter - - God rewarding love.

Let us look at the basic facts in the case.

God is love....Jesus Christ the personification of Love. God in love came in Christ. And while Christ was here on earth everything that He did, everything that He said, He did because He loved us. This was the primary motivation of His life, this was the reason why He died, this is why He lives forever.

While He was here on earth He was always trying to give people what He hoped would be an unforgettable picture of God. But the strange thing about man is that man has his own idea of what he thinks God is. Man always works within his own limitations, and man brings to God his own pre-conceived notion of God. Man is never quite content to take God at face value. He always wants to make God in his own image, he always wants to fashion God according to his purpose. But the everlasting truth about God is this: God will never be anything less than the God that He is.

Even though Christ had come to man, man kept thinking that maybe his God would ride a white charger, maybe his God would come and establish here on earth a kingdom. After all, the Jew was an exile at one time, he knew what it was to live in bondage. After all, the Jew knew what it was to have

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his land, his beloved country, occupied by an alien power....and so he kept thinking-- this God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, this God of whom the prophets spoke -- one day He will come as the Messiah, and when the Messiah comes, it will be our day....we will drive our enemies into the sea....the world will belong to ours, to our kind, forever and ever.

And all the time Jesus was here on earth He tried to tell them they had this mistaken notion, that He just wouldn't be this kind of a God, that He was the God of a kingdom, and that His Kingdom would be everlasting, without an end, but it was the Kingdom of the heart. They never quite understood. And that's why, you have to believe what I'm going to tell you now, that after the crucifixion they walked away....and the only things that they could remember were these.....He did speak His last word -- He was the one who said, "It is finished" -- He is the one who said, "Father, into Thy hands I commit my spirit" and bowed His head and gave up the ghostthey were the ones who remembered. If they had not seen it for themselves, at least what they had been told. They are the ones who perchance heard Him breathe His last....they were the ones who knew that that limp body was taken down from the cross and carried into a borrowed grave. And on these things they dwelt.

And then for these days between Good Friday and Easter morning they were the disenchanted, they were the disillusioned, they were the hopeless ones. Man's dream ordinarily, whatever it may be, does not die easily, but theirs collapsed suddenly. This promised Messiah -- He was just as human as anybody else....and they just couldn't quite go on believing that what He said was true. After all, there was a grave, and after all, there was a lifeless body.

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But then, over against that, there were two women who refused to believe that death could be as final as other people said that it was....two women by the very same name!.....two women who had an unusual relationship to Jesus Christ - - both of them called Mary - - Mary, His mother, and Mary the Magdala. They could not believe that this had been the end. And so they, of all people, did something that was very daring and very bold....

.....I'm sorry to have to tell you this, but you have to deal with the facts in the case. Ordinarily the Jews, for three days after someone they loved had been buried, would go back, day after day, to visit the grave. Hopefully they thought the soul would come back and be reunited with the tenement of clay. But in the case of Jesus Christ, once His body was put in the grave, there wasn't a single person who out of respect and devotion came back, the first day, or the second day. The company of disciples whom He had loved so dearly were a frightened band, and they kept themselves away from people because no one likes to be made light of, no one wants to be ridiculed, no one wants to be the supporter of a lost cause..and so they were afraid to show their faces....

...but over against that, there were two women, who even before the break of day, on the third day, under the cover of darkness, if you please, marked the path that led to His grave. They were the first to discover the miracle. And when they got there, they were told "He is not here" said the spokesman for God....and when they entered the grave and inside the sepulchre, what did they find? - there were the burial clothes, as though He had evaporated.... ..they were the first ones to be told, "He is not here."

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Now let me say this to you very, very quickly. Don't you dare ignore the Easter story just because you can't quite figure it out! Don't you dare walk away from a grave that's declared empty just because, you say, it doesn't make sense! And just because you can't quite understand the miracle of the Resurrection, don't you dare walk away and ignore it as though it had never happened! Begin where you can begin, my friend, begin with this: that Easter is essentially, at this point of our understanding, love's reward.

Jesus Christ waited to meet those who would respond to His love. Jesus Christ always has a rendezvous with those who are willing to be drawn into His nearness. There is no such thing as unfinished business where love is concerned, there is no such thing as unfinished business where God is concerned. God says - "You just can't write 'finish' to the story of My Son Christ when they took Him from the cross and put Him into a grave" The story of love is always a story of continuation. Love is eternal, love has no ending. God is love, and Love keeps coming back. Love always permits for a rendezvous. Love always says, there just isn't enough time, now, to tell the whole story....there's more yet to be said.

For shame upon you if you ever allow yourself to lose the glow of your first love! It's the salvation of many a soul, to go back and to remember when love was fresh! -- when love had its first glow, when love had its pristine quality....and in that first love letter that you ever wrote, you never signed your name permitting yourself to believe that you had said everything that you wanted to say to your beloved. And in any rendezvous that two lovers know, they always have to admit that there is such a thing as so little time -- there's never enough time to say everything that you want to say to your beloved. Love always is hoping for some other time...love

always is characterized by anticipation....love always looks forward to something yet to be said, something yet to be done. And so God comes back, if you please, God waits in the Resurrection Garden. He will never permit such a thing as unfinished business....it has to continue.

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And Mary the mother of our Lord, and Mary the Magdala - - I have to put it for you this way....perhaps the two people on the face of the earth who loved Him most - - were the ones who received the discovery of Easter. Drawn by Love, they kept their rendezvous with Love, and they were rewarded. And it all happened with the voicing of one word - - "Mary."

Some of us unashamedly admit that on the human level the thing most precious to our ears is to have our name spoken by someone we love. For anyone who loves us always puts meaning in a strange and wonderful accent. No one quite pronounces our name as the person who loves us most. You remember how it comes upon you quickly sometimes....waiting to meet someone in the air terminal, and then suddenly you come upon her - - and the only thing she can say is your name. God never forgets a name....God never forgets a need. And so God who is Love comes back and rewards the love of those who in love cry out to Him, in love cannot keep from Him.

What rejoicing there must have been in Heaven above when in that precise moment God beholds here on the face of the earth two people who are daring enough and reckless enough, throwing themselves with complete abandon as an expression of love, to go looking for Jesus Christ. The older I become, the more I am convinced that love always has its reward. God never allows it to go unrewarded. And the older I become the more I am convinced that the only lasting thing is love. All else perishes....everything else is but for a day.

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He was a wise and learned man who said, "If you ask me to serve as a biographer for any man, do not expect me to begin with the data that deals with his birth. If I am to understand his life at all, I will concentrate upon the end of his life -- tell me not how a man was born, let me know how he died! Tell me not how he began his years -- tell me how he ended his years." If you must say there is an end to the earthly pilgrimage of Jesus Christ, then you'll have to say that having loved His own, He loved them to the end.

I have not come to this sacred desk this morning to tell you how two women and a couple of disciples went to a grave and found only the burial clothes that were put upon the body of a man, and then an angel said, "He is not here, He is risen" -- I cannot, to your satisfaction, explain the technique of a miracle.....but if there is anyone here who is insensitive to love, if there is anyone here who is incapable of showing love, then I must say to you, you'll never understand the miracle of Easter.

But when God made you, God made you in His image, God made you in His likeness.....and what is God? -- still, as of old, the most sublime definition of God is this, expressed in three unforgettable words: "God is love." And in love Christ returned, and those who knew that He returned were those who offered to Him a loving heart.

And if you want to put yourself to the acid test, as to whether or not Jesus Christ is alive in your heart, then ascertain for yourself as best you can how much love you have in your heart....for God, and for Man. He spoke only one word, spoken in love -- your name. For nothing, absolutely nothing, can ever cut asunder the bond of love which God knows for you.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"HONEST DOUBT"

The sermon entitled "Honest Doubt" is based upon the Gospel for the day; and the text is from the 20th chapter of St. John, these two verses in particular, verses 24 and 25:

"But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe."

When one reaches the mid-point in life it can be an agonizing experience. For all other things being equal, there is the grim reality that he has already lived more years than perhaps he has yet to live. And becoming middle-aged can become a time of evaluation, looking back with a kind of somber reflection upon the impressionable years in one's life in particular. And then some of the mistakes of adolescence and late adolescence and early adulthood stand out in a very glaring way. And you agonize as you see yourself, as you were....all the hasty decisions, all the unkind prejudices that were part of your thinking.

You have already recognized that this is somewhat of a confession as this sermon begins. When I was a lad, the one disciple that I could not possibly appreciate was the disciple called Thomas. John the beloved disciple, who leaned upon the breast of our Lord....Peter - vascillating, sometimes hot, sometimes cold - I could appreciate him. Thomas?.....no. It was not easy for me to appreciate a man who had been in the company of our blessed Lord for three years, and then to be able to say, "I still have to have proof. Unless you can show me in black and white - - "I rather resented the fact that he could be in the company with the disciple band, a group of men with whom he had associated closely, day after day, even year after year, and then to say, "I won't take

your word for it."

Maybe it's because in the years of my life that have come and gone I was a bit more naive than I'd like to think I am now. And I was always kindly disposed toward people and I was willing to take at face value what they said, and I couldn't quite understand how Thomas could refuse to accept at face value what his trusted companions had told him....

..."Unless I can see for myself

I won't believe -- I don't care what you say!"

.....and he might also have said -- "and I don't care how you remind me of what Jesus said -- as of this moment I've got to see it for myself!"

Well there were those days when I couldn't appreciate Thomas.

And then as I recognized that here was this pastor whom I adored and respected, who had two sons, and one of them -- of all the names that he could have chosen....David....John....Andrew -- I'd even have settled for Bartholomew!.....but he named him Thomas.

Now this is the confession. Of all the disciples that I respect today, there is none that can quite match Thomas. How one's mind can change, how he can change in his appreciation for what a person is and has been. Because now I see that Thomas was able to say to Jesus Christ what no other disciple was able to say so grandly and so gloriously -- you never say anything more wonderful to Jesus Christ than when you can say as Thomas said --

"My Lord.....and my God."

...when you can say that, you are able to say everything that God intended a man to say about Jesus Christ -- "My Lord and my God." For to see Jesus Christ as anything less than Master, to see Him as anything less than God, is not to see

Him as He is.

Now what I couldn't appreciate in the impressionable years of my life was this thing called experience. And there are some things that come to us only as we share them in the crucible which is called experience. You see, experience is something that a teenager doesn't have -- he just hasn't lived long enough. Experience comes out of the stuff of life. And then as you have it you look back and you evaluate it and you call it by name. Now when I look at Thomas I see that his is the great faith, the faith that came out of honest doubting. His is the result of a struggle, and maybe in the sight of God this is something that you and I ought to know. Maybe it isn't too good a thing that you and I share the benefit of a refined faith, maybe there's so much about our religion that has these gentle touches about -- it's all packaged up -- we can put it into a Creed and we can say, this is it!

I'm perfectly aware of the risk that I take when as the Pastor I say to my Confirmation Class, "If anyone should ever ask you what you believe, what it is to be a Christian, you stand right up and say, 'I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth: And in Jesus Christ -- '...recite those three paragraphs of the Creed -- that's the Christian faith for you!'" And then as you know, we encourage them to memorize Luther's Catechism, particularly Luther's Explanation of the Second Article of the Creed, for we say to them, this is magnificent expression of John 3:16, which is the heart of the Gospel....."I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the

Father from all Eternity, and true Man, born of the
Virgin Mary, is my Lord, Who has redeemed me, lost and
condemned creature, secured and delivered me from all sin
and death and the power of the devil, not with silver and gold -- "

....I know I take a great risk when I say, "You stand up and recite these words" because you see, when they recite those words, they're giving you the benefit of somebody else's experience, and you and I must recognize the fact in life that somewhere we have to fill those words with meaning! -- somewhere, somehow we have to say "We know these things to be true".

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When I go back and begin all over again with Thomas, I come face to face with a man who is dealing with the raw facts of life. You know that we've been grateful that in our schedule at Saint Luke Church we have been able to include what we call the Easter Eve Vigil. Some of you have been part of it ever since we began.

But as the response became so great, we had to modify the type of Easter Eve Vigil we were offering. Originally we had it in two sections, and we could accommodate a smaller group of people that way....we began down in Bieber Hall in darkness....and then the second section took place up here in the Nave. And some of us think that maybe we've lost something as we've grown and developed with the Easter Eve Vigil. And one of the things it seems to us that we've lost was that we used to begin in Bieber Hall....you came into a room that was as near dark as possible....and at the far end of Bieber Hall there was a roughly-hewn cross, and as I remember it from the first year, I think I can still smell something of the dampness of the wood when I entered the hall. It wasn't gold-plated, you see, it wasn't highly polished brass, there wasn't anything refined about it at all.....and when you came in you were shocked by the sight of it. You recognized it for what it was -- grim reminder of an instrument of torture, an instrument of death.

Maybe you and I lose something, you see, when we come into a Nave as lovely as this, and as lovely as we want it to be, and then we sit quietly and look upon

C the polished brass cross - - maybe your reaction would be entirely different if standing here right now was that roughly-hewn wooden cross, cut to the size of a man's body. I once attended a meeting where a pastor said, "We were going to put up a cross like that for our Good Friday service. When the man came to make the cross for us he said, 'Well, what should be the dimensions?'...and one of the men suggested, 'Well Pastor, why don't you stretch out here on the floor, and then we'll see just what it ought to be'".....he said, "As I did that, then I began to appreciate as perhaps I hadn't appreciated before, just what a cross was."

O Well you see, Thomas knew what it was. Thomas dealt with the raw fact of it. It was there in front of him, it was a terrible reminder. And even though people came and said, "This is what we have seen, this is what we have heard!"he said, "I will not believe it until I have more proof."

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Y It's not a sinful thing to doubt. It's what you do with your doubts that matters. It's not a wicked thing to say, I can't believe - - it's a wicked thing to say, I don't want to believe. You see, we are the comfortable creatures. We are the prosperous Christians. We are the people who have all the benefits of medical science, financial, economic security. You and I who are here now - - - we are not the lonely, we are not the dejected. We have so great security. Therefore we are able to walk by sight....the props are always around us.

But what if the night becomes dark, and the road is lonely? It's one thing to be brave when you see the streaks of the dawn, promise of another day. It's an entirely different thing to go into the blackness of the night, and not know for sure whether or not you'll see the morning. It's one thing to have the doctor come to you with the chart and say, "From every indication that I have in front of me, the patient will recover".....it's another thing to have the doctor

say, "I don't know...I can't give you any assurance...we will have to wait." And what is it to wait but then to walk by faith, and not by sight. Give Thomas his due and proper credit -- it wasn't that he didn't want to believe; he wanted to believe, only he just needed some kind of gentle assurance.

Pastor McVicker and I could tell you that one of the men we esteemed most when we were students in Seminary was that venerable man of God with the beard....
...a frail creature...(incidentally, he was a member of this congregation at the time of his death -- he transferred his membership when he came here and lived in Silver Spring at the time of his retirement)...grand old Dr. Herbert Christian Alleman....a man who looked like a prophet suddenly come to life.

He had a way of dealing with students. And one day in a prize moment he told me how a student came to him, almost proudly and arrogantly -- "Dr. Alleman, I think I'll turn my back upon the Christian faith -- I can't accept the creeds -- I'm going to reject them". And Dr. Alleman, with all the wisdom of his years, took all the wind out of the sails of the young man by simply saying, "But aren't you a bit young to do this?" You see, there would come a day when what he couldn't possibly accept now, he would have to subscribe to, because life has a way of forcing us to lean upon the arms of faith, and we Christians are privileged to say, the arms of God. We stand on the promises of Christ.

Well, this is the final thing to tell you about Thomas. He came back. Pessimist that he was, he did find himself in the company of believers.

Well let me say this to you.....if you are ever prone to go by yourself, ask God to give you the grace and the strength to find your way back into the company of people who do believe. And as Thomas came back He was there! And the story of Thomas is above all else the story of Jesus Christ, who deals with

us, you see, according to our doubts, who deals with us according to our weaknesses.....and with the utmost of confidence Jesus Christ says, "Thomas, if this is what you have to have, stretch forth your hand -- put your finger here -- "

....and then it was that Thomas exclaimed,

"My Lord, and my God"

Doubt you may. The shameful thing is not to doubt. The shameful thing is not knowing how to handle your doubts. It's absolutely impossible for you to know everything about the mind of God -- if you could do that, you would be equal to God. So what does God do? God says, "I've made you so you can believe."

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(this sermon transcribed as recorded)

"THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT"

The sermon bearing the title, "The Work of the Holy Spirit" is based upon the Gospel for today; and the text could well be verses 7 and 8 of the 16th chapter of John:

"Nevertheless I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.
But when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: - - "

Last week in New York, attending sessions of a Board meeting, there was limited opportunity for free time. I found my way, during one of those periods, to an art gallery. It was an exceedingly interesting display, quite a variety. Some of the work I thought I could understand at once. With my limited understanding of it, it did seem to me that I caught what the painter had in mind.

This was not true with other works. I found it very, very difficult to walk away and say, what a wonderful thing this is, and I think I get the message of the artist.....and for the moment at least, I said to myself, if only the man who did this work could be standing by my side, or if only his teacher could be here, then I think I could begin to understand it if I could see it through his eyes, if the painter could say to me, "Well, this is what I had in mind - can't you see?"...and then as he would interpret for me his work, then it would become increasingly plain.

Now there are those who maintain that if you can't see it at once, then your gift of appreciation is lost. But I have little patience with those who talk like that to me, because if a man has a gift, I would like to be able to appreciate what it is that he has. And if he's trying to tell me something, I think it's wasted effort if I don't get his message; and I'm not ashamed, then, to rely upon an inter-

preter, to have someone take me by the hand and say, "See - - "hopefully, of course, it would become plain. Make no mistake about it, all of us are in need of interpreters, all of us never fully understand the language of life. We're always relying upon somebody to say, "See - - understand now?"

With this by way of introduction, let me tell you this - - God is His own best interpreter. It's no discredit to God, but there are some things about God that we can't understand. It's not a shameful thing to say of God that there are some things that are not plain to us, when we recognize this as the work of God. This we ought to be able to understand, because who among us is bold enough and brave enough, vain enough, if you please, to say that he can always understand exactly what it is that God is trying to say? God is the great artist, and the world and created man His masterpiece....is there any among us who can walk up to it and say, "Ah, I understand exactly what God the artist is saying." If this were so, then you would have the mind of God, you would be equal to God. There is much about God that remains a mystery, and this is understandably so.

But God wants to be understood. God wants His truth to be made plain, God wants us to see clearly. So God takes on the role of the interpreter. God says, "I will explain it to you - - I will tell you about myself!"

So it is that I come to this Gospel lesson for the day. You know the historical setting, don't you? Three years have run their course. Jesus had been with His disciples, they had done a number of things together. But now in the plan of God, Jesus was to return to Heaven, the disciples were to stay on earth. No longer would they be associating Him with the familiar, no longer would they be thinking of Him in time and in space. Marvelous, absolutely marvelous, you see, they had gotten along so well that they were able to discern Him for what He was. And

there were times and moments of great insight when they were able to say, this is God! - - to think of one person, and say "Jesus of Nazareth -- GOD!"

Oh, they didn't always say it, they didn't always think it. There was the ~~ebb~~ of the spirit, you see, when they had their moments when they did believe, and they had their moments when they did not believe, but there were times when they were able to say of Him what they never said about anybody else.

But now these three years were over. What would happen to their thought about God now? Would they have to think of God in the past tense? Would they say, "This was the God that was"? You have to be very careful when you use the past tense with God, because the past tense, sometimes when it's used, means action completed - over - it's ended. And the God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is not the kind of God who is given to ceasing operating. You just don't use the term 'stop' with God. So Jesus knew very well that when He returned to Heaven, they just couldn't say it, when they thought about God, "That is the way it was".

So Jesus said, "When I go away - - "

....this visitation of God in the flesh,
this kind of limitation which God
has taken upon Himself in time and
space....

....."When I go away the Holy Spirit is going to come - - the Comforter - - you'll be visited by God, and then He's going to take everything that I ever told you, and He's going to explain it to you, and you'll be able to see the meaning of my life through His eyes."

That's how wonderful God is. He takes upon Himself the role of the interpreter. And Martin Luther is absolutely right in the Explanation of the Third Article of the

Creed, when he tells us that none of us, by our own reason, by our own strength, can come to God. You and I respond to God because God is at work in our lives -- today -- even now. What a lamentable thing if, whenever you and I thought about God we thought about a place, maybe five thousand miles away, about a time, maybe two thousand years ago -- to always use the past tense. God says, this isn't the way it is -- "I AM".....and while it is perfectly true that there was, in the fulness of time, when God came in Christ, yet all that Christ is, and all that God is, is forever active in your behalf and in my behalf. All that God is is constantly at work.

Because you and I are finite, because you and I are human, because we have our limitations, we can't possibly understand the mind and the purpose of God, except God interprets it for us. Let me tell you again -- I prize the illustration so much that I go on repeating it for you, and you can well afford to hear it again -- I can think of no better way to explain what I have in mind.....

.....in the Lexington School for the Deaf, the committed teacher becomes the key by which those who are denied the gift of speech and hearing are taught to speak.

And how does she go about her work? It's accomplished only as the teacher comes to the child.....and the teacher kneels down alongside of the child....and the teacher takes the hand of the child, and places the hand of the child against her own lips and against her own throat. This is the way she begins to teach somebody else to speak. It happens only as the teacher comes to the child...it happens only as the teacher stoops to the level of the child....it happens only as the teacher takes the initiative. Otherwise the child would live in a world all of its own and denied the blessings now about to be made available.....

So it is, I say to you, with God. We are confined within the limitations of

our own little world, we are locked up, we are denied so much, until God comes to us, until God takes the initiative. That's the kind of God we have.

And that's why when Jesus Christ was talking about His going away He said....

"...but He isn't the kind of God who goes away and forgets about you.....He isn't the kind of God who writes 'finish' on any chapter. He is continually at work. Now while I'm going away, you'll be visited by the Holy Spirit, and you can't possibly understand what I've tried to do unless the Holy Spirit makes it plain to you and interprets it for you."

"Then," said Jesus Christ, "when the Holy Spirit comes, He's going to carry on my work."

I don't know whether you've found it or not, but it's a very interesting discovery when you read the letters of Paul, and you're hard put to find the distinction that Paul makes between the risen Jesus, the glorified Christ, and the work of the Spirit. For Paul they seem to be one and the same thing -- the Spirit is carrying on the work of Jesus, the Spirit is doing everything that Jesus did while He was here on earth. All that God accomplished in Christ is immediately available for you and for me anywhere, everywhere, to any man.

"Then," said Jesus, "let me tell you what He's going to do.

He comes after me - - "

....and as far as John is concerned, he has Jesus saying He was going to do three things, this Spirit. He's going to convict you and me of sin. Now, it has to be ~~you~~ that way. Until a man sees himself the sinner as he is, he has no appreciation for a Saviour. And part of the job that God has with you and me is to open our eyes to the need for everything that God has to give. This is the folly of man,

you see, that he thinks that he is himself self-sufficient.....this is the folly of man, that he thinks of himself always an independent creature. One of the first lessons that some of us have to learn is that man is a dependent creature. It's a lesson that has to be taught. So the Holy Spirit comes to us, and in marked contrast we see God as He is in Christ, and then we get the picture of ourselves, and we find ourselves in the place that Simon Peter was when he said, "Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man." Peter never spoke like that until there was that encounter with Jesus Christ. The words of the devoutly religious always include in the vocabulary -- SIN, SAVIOUR.....SAVIOUR, SIN.

The second thing the Holy Spirit will do is to convince us of righteousness. There's a blessed thought for you! God is holy and God is righteous. He is the loving heavenly Father, but He's morally dependable. In this world that seems to be so devil-possessed, cherish the thought, my friend, that seated upon the throne in Heaven above there is one who is mindful of the moral order, and where righteousness will ultimately prevail. The unrighteous may have their day, but God has eternity in the hollow of His hand. And this is what God is always trying to say to you and to me -- "Believe me.....trust me.....be patient with me".....but you and I forget, you and I forget. And vain as we are, you see, we're always trying to write God off on our terms, and God just doesn't trust you enough to allow you to write Him off on your terms. But vain as we are, we go on asking these questions..

....God, why did you take her away?

....God, why such things as a concentration camp?

....God, why such a thing as a march of death?

....God, why such a thing as man's inhumanity to man - fellow creatures seeing one another as less than human?

....God, why do the innocent suffer, why do the wicked prosper?
...then the Holy Spirit comes and He keeps saying to us, "But remember, He who created the world is trust-worthy" -- it operates only on the principle of righteousness. This is what God is always trying to say to us. But because we have limited vision, we don't always see it. Shall I put it for you? -- God is the sublime, the supreme optimist. Righteousness will prevail.

And if this is to be so, then God goes on, through the Holy Spirit, to talk to us about judgment. Sin.....righteousness.....judgment. There will be a day. Whether you are aware of this or not, I feel constrained to tell you, that you will not hear this preaching everywhere. There are certain men who would laugh at me for what I'm telling you. They say it's passe -- it's something of a by-gone generation -- we don't talk about this any more.

But we do recite it in the Creed.....He will come again - Jesus is coming again, He is coming again, and when He comes again, He comes to judge. And on one side will be those who have delighted in His way, who have allowed their life to be bent according to His purpose and suited according to His holy will. And on the other side -- those who have wilfully disobeyed. There is going to be a line.

But man, who is the independent creature, man who is the proud creature, man who is so clever, keeps saying to himself, "it isn't so".....and he keeps saying it to himself because he doesn't want it to be so. But if righteousness has any meaning at all, there must be a day of judgment. If salvation has any meaning at all, there must be a place to which the elected will go -- elected by their faith and by their trust in their Saviour.

You see, if this were not so, if this is not happening now, then you and I, of all people, would be the most miserable, because we'd always be talking about

the God who was. But He's the God who is. I want to share with you a very lovely story. It comes out of Russia, it comes from our day....

...devout Christians were told that it was illegal to assemble for worship. There were those who defied the authorities, and they gathered one time in a clandestine fashion, that they might have a corporate worship experience. And as they were worshipping Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the door suddenly opened, and it was the agent of the secret police, accompanied by a body of his men. Immediately he said, "Take their names - record the name of everyone present." The subordinate did what he was told to do. And then the agent said, "You will await your summons - - you know what this means, you run the risk of facing a very severe penalty."and as the officer in charge was about to leave the room, an old man stopped him at the door, and he said, "There's a name you didn't get." The agent said, "What do you mean? My lieutenant took all the names of everybody present. He doesn't make a mistake." The old peasant said, "But there's a name that you don't have - - you think you got them all, but you don't".....the agent said, "I don't understand, but if it will satisfy you any, we'll take another roll."

....so they took another roll - - thirty - - just as before, and they verified every name and every person. The peasant said, "But there's still somebody else here, and you don't have his name." And impatiently the agent said, "Let me have his name, then, if you know who he is." The peasant said -- the name that's on your lips --

"....He is our Lord Jesus Christ. When He was here on earth He said to His disciples, 'I will never leave you, I will never forsake you.

...where two or three are gathered together, I will always be there.'"

.....the agent walked away, laughing ridiculously at the folly of thirty Christians.

This is a folly that becomes us....this is our hope - - God is here. He is present. He is never the God who was.

* * *

"IF YOU ASK ANYTHING"

C There has been, of course, the temptation to preach on something other than the Gospel assigned for the day. Yet, nonetheless, there is this Gospel for this particular Sunday that demands its own rightful attention. The sermon, then based upon the Gospel for the day, bears the title, "If You Ask Anything"; and the text, from the 16th chapter of John, the 23rd verse:

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"And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whetsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you."

It is an understatement, I presume, to say that each of us has his own particular problem with God. This is quite natural, of course it is, because of what God is and because of who God is; and because of who we are and because of what we are. God is so much greater than we. Who can possibly understand His ways? Who can easily discern His will?

Among the problems that we may name that occur to us when we think about our relationship to God, this one cannot be ignored: the matter of God's silences - - when we cry out to Him, and He doesn't seem to hear - - when we beg Him to speak, and there is no word that we hear. This is quite true for any number of people...

...."I cried unto the Lord but He did not hear - -

....I made my plea, and He paid no attention to me - - "

....in fact, there's a Gospel lesson that occurs in the calendar of the Church that deals with this....how a Syrophenician woman kept crying again and again and again, and there is that stark statement from the Gospel record itself: " - - and He answered her not a word." For some, then, this is a problem, how to deal with God's silences.

Then on the other hand, there is for some of us this problem: how when God does speak, and we can hear Him speak, we will listen to Him long enough to give Him a chance to finish His sentences. God does speak. This is one of the great things, you see, that Christians have to tell people, that ours is a God who does reveal Himself. God, whom we know in Jesus Christ, wants to make Himself known, and He's coming to us again and again, in ever so many different ways, always trying to impress upon us the fact that He is, and that He loves us.

And then every now and then when God begins to speak, we are so pre-occupied that we're not quite certain that we hear Him exactly, or perhaps we're so busy and we're so impatient with the things of this world that when God speaks we don't hear Him out. For me....I frankly admit that the problem is not ~~one~~ of how to deal with God's silences. Ashamed to admit as I am, my particular problem is that when God does speak, I don't always hear Him out. For shame upon us, that we will not give Him the courtesy to finish His sentence, and because this is true, like as not for you and for me, we get into all kinds of trouble, and some of the most wonderful things that God wants to tell us we never hear....because we walk away before He is finished speaking.

Any preacher will tell you this, that it's a matter of established record that when a preacher stands up to preach he knows very well that only a very small percentage of what he is trying to say is going to be understood, perchance even heard at all. Any man who sits in the pew may find it an extremely difficult thing to shut his mind to the outside world - - there are so many things that keep creeping in upon you, even when you walk into the very presence of God's House.

This might have been true for Jesus. He had spent three years with the disciples. He wanted them to know so much....He was always telling them things they

never knew before, always telling them those wonderful things about the nature and the character of God. And then ever so frequently He had to discover how much they hadn't heard -- how much they didn't understand.

Now this Gospel lesson deals with the final session, one of the final sessions, that Jesus had with His disciples. The pressure of the years had come upon Him...

soon He was to return to Heaven, they were to remain. To make certain that they got the whole story about God, He now tells them, with one grand and sweeping gesture --

" Listen -- ask anything from God, and He'll give it.

Name it -- tell God you want it -- and He'll give

it to you -- "

...that's a grand and wonderful thing to hear God say.

But I warn you....give God a chance to finish His sentence. Jesus Christ is apt to use a qualifying phrase. You see, when we hear Him, we always hear Him through our own ears, through our own mind. Chances are we hear what we think we heard Him say, what we think we would like to have heard Him say, to a man who is in duty bound to listen carefully for any qualifying phrase that Jesus may use.

And when He used this grand sweeping gesture "Ask for anything -- -- ", He did use this phrase of limitation -- "But it has to be in my name. God will give it -- only -- if it's in my name."

You see, it was like this. They had been accustomed to living with Jesus. Whenever an emergency arose -- "Jesus, where are you?"five thousand people -- "Jesus, they ought to be fed." -- so they turned to Jesus -- He took over...

....a couple of them adrift at sea....a storm came up quickly....

...they were in peril of dying -- "Jesus, where are you? --

"Help us.....take over!"

.....and so He did. All the while He was with them, whatever they needed, they had only to turn to Him.

Now, once a man becomes accustomed to certain things, it isn't easy to face the prospect that he might have to learn to live without them. Don't you think for a single minute that that disciple band wasn't worrying on this score, when He kept saying to them, "A little while from now, and I won't be here -- I'm going to go back to my Father." Human as they were they became anxious -- "How can we ever get along without you, Jesus?"

Of course you know, God thinks of everything, and His mercy isn't like a water spigot that can be turned off -- His mercy isn't like a well that can be tapped and then runs dry.....His flow remains constant. And so Jesus says, knowing their fears, "From here on in, you can ask for anything -- in my name -- and God will give it to you."

A traveler once went to Africa, and when he went to Africa he was completely fascinated by the great falls. He thought of their beauty, he thought of their grandeur, and in this regard he was like almost any other tourist who went to Africa and beheld the falls. But this tourist was different. He was deeply moved by the fact that here was an untapped power -- here, apparently, was unlimited resource. If only it could be harnessed, if only it could be channeled -- what a transformation would take place to all the surrounding territory! You see, that's what Jesus is trying to tell these disciples. God has unlimited power. God wants it to be put to use, He wants your life to be transformed.... ..and can't you see Jesus, with the piercing of those dark brown eyes and the waving of His hand -- "Go ahead and ask - ask anything - in my name...and I guarantee you'll get it."

C Now let us be very honest with ourselves. These are absolutely wonderful words. But how do you and I react to them? In many instances, having heard these words of Jesus Christ, we walk away, and we simply do not believe them to be true. We lack faith. Isn't it Tolstoy in his "War and Peace" who has that account about the messenger who brought the word to the Russian headquarters that Napoleon was retreating from Moscow. You see, for years they had been fiercely engaged in the battle. All of Russia's future was at stake, and there were those weeks and those months that didn't look very promising....but then this night the messenger comes and says he's retreating....

OKoutouzov, the old commander in chief, knew exactly what that meant. Russia would be saved. And once he heard these words from the messenger he was speechless. And the messenger waited awkwardly for someone to say something. There was a lieutenant present and he was about to say something, but the commander motioned for him to keep quiet.....and then with a very strange peculiar look upon his face, the commander in chief turned, turned to the wall in the office upon which were hanging the icons, the images of their deity, their token of respect for God.....and then with sheer surprise he exclaimed, "Great God, my Lord and Creator! Thou hast heard my prayer. Russia is saved." And then he burst into tears.

Y It was never intended that these words should come as a surprise to anyone. When Jesus spoke these words, "You can ask for anything, in my name, and the Father will give it to you" -- they were spoken as a bit of assurance, to inspire in each of us confidence, to enable us to believe that God is trustworthy, that He does come through. This is the sad thing about our generation: we're not quick to believe. We just won't take Jesus at His word. There it is, this unclaimed riches -- "If you ask anything, anything in the name of Jesus, God

will give it to you."

C Ah, but there's another reaction that we bring to these words. It may not be simply lack of faith. It may also be lack of ambition. A surprising number of us are quite content to keep life much as it is! It's rather a shameful thing, of course it is, to lack faith and become so sophisticated and to become so intelligent, to become so scientific that you believe you can get along very well by yourself.....and maybe that's the damning thing to be said about us. We foolishly believe that we can get along very well without God. Then we come with this reaction - - quite content to keep things as they are! Who needs God? This is characteristic of more people than you may care to admit, characteristic of more people than you may wish to recognize - - even yourself, my friend. For you see, what has been happening? - - baptized in the Faith....confirmed in the Faith....and shameful thing! - - you and I are very much like what we were before all this happened! No great change! Alas and alack, it's all too often true, and all because we haven't much of a desire to become any better. God says, here it is.....and we not so much as reach for it, let alone ask.

Y And God in Christ goes on beckoning us to take. Maybe this is a characteristic of our generation: we put Jesus Christ over there. We're captivated by the sheer beauty and majesty of His personality. We admire Him. That's the way it was with the tourist who went to Africa. He was fascinated by the beauty and the grandeur of the great falls. He admired them. But Jesus Christ was never meant just to be admired.....Jesus Christ never came into the world just to permit us to be fascinated by Him. Jesus Christ came into the world - - all that He is in God can be ours, that His unlimited resources can be made available to you and to me!

Would you permit an autobiographical note. This day means more to me than I can possibly tell you, for it enables a man to recall a prize moment in his life, when he was set aside as a minister of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. And if the marking of anniversary should serve any purpose whatsoever, it should be a time of evaluation. And so in sober moments of reflection I have been asking myself, what have I been doing these twenty-five years? He who is the Great Judge shall take me to task and say, "From that night of May 22, 1940, what were you doing?"

I'd like to think that I'm qualified to answer. For a man ought to be able to take a good long look at himself. And whether others can recognize it or not, at least they could listen to him while he says, "Whatever else it may be, this is the noble intention of my soul" -- and that's not vanity at all.

A man ought to be able to trust the people whom he loves in Christ, to tell them point blank what is the noble intention of his soul....and I'll tell you what it is. I'd like to think that during these twenty-five years God has allowed me to walk with certain people, to take them by the hand, and to say --

"Hear -- listen! -- listen to what God is telling you!"

...to take them by the hand and say --

"Look -- Look at what God wants to give you! Don't stay as you once were -- look! Jesus Christ wants to transform your life! Stay no longer a sinner -- be cleansed by the grace of God!"

If you haven't been able to detect it, this I now tell you is what I have been trying to do.....encouraging you to believe.....inspiring you to trust the Saviour..
.....introducing you to One whose resources unlimited were meant for you.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"WITNESSES"

The sermon entitled, "Witnesses" is based upon the Gospel for the Day; and the text is also a portion of the 26th verse as well as the 27th, of the 15th chapter of John:

"But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me: And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning."

God, of course, thinks of everything, and by this time that disciple band, of all people, should have known it. Naturally they had their anxious moments, for somehow they had been given to understand that the days of our Blessed Lord on earth were being numbered. That's why ever so often He gathered them together as a little company, trying to make the most of the remaining time that He had with them, and then taking them into His confidence He would tell them certain things.

Now it had been made plain to them that He was going to return to Heaven and they would stay on earth. No longer would they walk in familiar paths, no longer would they go to familiar places. All of this would come to an end. What, then, would happen to them? What could they make of their reliance upon Jesus? - - they who were so prone to turn to Him at any moment, and always know that within reach were these available resources - - they who had received from Him the pure witness of God!.....for you see, whenever they were with Him it was all so real -- it was, verily so, as though they were in the presence of God. Who, now, would tell them about Him?...who, now would comfort and console and strengthen them?

God thinks of everything. So Christ says, "When Jesus goes away - - when I depart, the Holy Spirit is going to come and He is going to give you the testimony - - He is going to tell you the things of God - - He is going to make God real to you - - He is going to bring the claim of God upon your heart. All of this will continue. God is never without witnesses, even if He has to be the witness Himself."

And then at this point, undoubtedly Jesus Christ turned and said to the disciples: "The Holy Spirit will witness for me, that's right - - but you also are going to be my witnesses."

What does that say to you and to me? There are very, very few things that God ever sees fit to do by Himself. Not that He's unable, not that He's unwilling. But like as not, God, when He wants something done, will turn to a human being, and especially where this world is involved, God will say, "I'm going to accomplish it through you. That's precisely what He was saying to those disciples...." "The Holy Spirit will do His job - He'll testify all right, but you also become part of the picture - - you too shall be my witnesses."

If that were not so, undoubtedly you and I would not know anything about Jesus Christ. For how have you come to know about Jesus Christ? You begin now to see faces, don't you? You begin now to hear voices, don't you?God's agents, God's messengers.....for in the plan of God, God works person through person, person by person. It may be a slow and awkward process, but it's still God's preferred method. And don't you ever forget that when He saw fit to give us His most effective witness, when He wanted to speak in the plain as possible voice, He reached for a Mary, He reached for a Joseph, He spoke to us through God become Incarnate, in a human being.

And all the while Jesus was here, He went about, going from one person to another, from one group of people to another, always talking, always revealing the things of God.

Now this morning I want to talk to you a little bit about this whole subject of witnessing, because it's a truth that applies to every single one of us. If you'll permit, there are three things that I want to tell you.

One is, any man can be a witness for Jesus Christ - - any man.....ah, but I must speak quickly - granted he has the necessary qualifications. It just wasn't to anybody that Jesus Christ turned and said, "Now the Holy Spirit will testify all right, but you also shall be my witnesses" - - - dare you allow me to say it? -- it was to a select group of people to whom these words were spoken. They were the ones who had the necessary qualifications.

Who were they? They were the ones who had been exposed to Jesus Christ, they were the ones who had the experience, they were the ones who had been with Him....they were the ones who had seenthey were the ones who had heard. And because they had this experience, they automatically qualified.

This is a truth not at all difficult for you to understand. Who is the man who goes to the witness stand in a court trial? The defense or the prosecution, either one would be foolish indeed to call any man who would be unable to say, "This is what I heard - this is what I saw - I was there." If he cannot speak out of experience, he is disqualified.

Now any man who has had an experience of Jesus Christ can qualify as a witness. They tell me that we have more Christians now than we've ever had before in the history of man. And ours also is a generation that talks a great deal about the witness of the laity....

.....we who are heirs of the Protestant teaching that every man becomes

a priest.....we who strike the note that every man shall be to any other man as Jesus Christ.....are also a generation that has been characterized as quite ineffective in its witness. On Tuesday we shall go to Synod. We will review what's happened in the past year. Would you believe me if I were to tell you that in all likelihood will be presented in Synod that we haven't gained 1% over last year in our active church membership rolls.....with perhaps more members than we've ever had before, we still haven't been able to chalk up to the glory of God an increase of 1% where it matters most. If this should be true, and if we have more witnesses, and more manpower, and more equipment, it could be that the nature and the character of our experience is faulty, it could be that having not been possessed by the Spirit, we are not energized properly, we are not motivated properly to pass the word along. The ones who heard Jesus Christ say "You shall be my witnesses" were the people of the experience.

Now any man who has this experience can qualify as a witness. The word any man is important. There was a period in the history of the Church when we permitted people to believe that unless you were ordained, unless you were a pastor set aside, unless you were a deaconess especially consecrated, unless you were a missionary, commissioned - - you were not considered as a full effective witness for Jesus Christ. For shame upon the Church that she ever allowed the people to think like that! Any man who has had an experience of Jesus Christ qualifies as a witness. You're not forgetting, are you, that in that original disciple band there wasn't an ordained preacher in the lot - - every single one was a layman - fisherman, tax-collector - each had his own occupation. Any man can be a witness.....granted he has had the experience.

When the old Scotswoman said to her son, leaving his home on the day when he was going to preach his very first sermon, she said to him quite properly, "My lad, whatever you do, speak a good word for Jesus Christ!"

....but if she had a daughter who was going to leave home and go to take a job as the accountant or the secretary or the nurse, she could just as properly spoken to the daughter,

"Whatever you do, speak a good word for Jesus Christ."

....and of course if she had a son who was a cobbler, when he went to his bench to repair and to restore shoes, she could just as properly have said to the cobbler, "Son, whatever you do, speak a good word for Jesus Christ."

.....any man who has had an experience with Jesus Christ can qualify.

There are those who have had an experience and they volunteer their witness - - they just can't be quiet. Incidentally, Christians were never meant to keep their mouths shut. Really now, there never should have been any such thing as a silent Christian, because once you have had an experience you can't deny it - - it just naturally should be expressed.

It was a precious moment when I made the discovery, it was a revealing thing. I came upon a teenager in love. I could detect it -- the whole world had to -- there was a light in his eye, there was a spring in his step, he who did not whistle before now whistled. If this can be true on a very human level, how much more so when one discovers that there's a love affair going on between Christ and a human soul! Jesus took for granted that this had happened between Him and the disciples, so He said, "You're going to be witnesses - that's the name that I have for you."any man who has the

experience qualifies - - that's the first thing to be said about witnessing -
- any man.

The second thing: any man with what he has. The glory of the Christian experience is that God can use a variety of gifts to give glory to His holy name. There may be a time when the word has to be spoken, when you have to spell out through words what it means to be a Christian and what it means to respond to God's love, but God does not limit Himself to the spoken word. Undoubtedly Mr. Granmer, with his true sensitivity, remembers when he first came to us, and in any number of conferences that he has had with the Pastor of this church it's been made known to him that when he goes to the console and uses his hands, he is speaking for Jesus Christ, that what happens there at the console in any worship experience is as essential to this corporate worship of ours in its own way as the preaching of the Word, the reading of the lesson, the offering of the prayer. And again and again we talk about how when he goes to a choir rehearsal and God gives him a handful of people right there in front of him, he shall be to them in that choir rehearsal as the very agent of God. Any man with what he has - - with whatever gift God has bestowed upon him, can bear witness to Jesus Christ.

Some of us have our moments when we recall those very, very wonderful people that God has allowed us to know, and I am thinking of that more-than-an-octogenarian now.....he first came to us when we were looking for someone to design this quiet corner in God's House that's known as the Chapel of the Grateful Heart. Some of us believe that he has designed it to near perfection. He had a real feeling for his assignment. And one day I said to this man who has lived more than eighty years, "How did you get to do this work,

and with such true sensitivity?" And immediately he answered, "Early in my life I thought I'd like to serve my Lord as a preacher, but then I found out that I couldn't speak very well, not easily in public, and I was ashamed of this faulty tongue. But then I decided if I couldn't speak with my lips, I'd speak for God with my hands." And so he gave his life to Jesus Christ, designing altars and pulpits and lecterns and baptismal fonts, providing us with furnishings where it's made easier to think the thoughts of God. Any man, with what he has, can glorify God - - give witness to His redeeming grace.

Any man, with whatever he has....wherever he may be. And maybe this is the point that you and I must underline most, for here, too, we can be very foolish in our thinking and believe that it's a lot easier to testify for Christ somewhere else. Let me tell you with all the ardor of my soul - - if you can't be a witness for Christ where you are, you can't easily witness for Christ anywhere else. He who said to His disciples, "You shall be my witnesses," was speaking like this to people who were living in Jerusalem, and Jerusalem was not a very favorable climate for witnessing for Jesus Christ. Any man, with what he has, wherever he may be - - that's the point at which to begin.....wherever you may be.

That also means that God doesn't confine this witnessing to one place, like right now. That also means, you see, that God doesn't confine this witnessing to one day. Any man, with what he has, no matter where he may be..... if you live in an apartment, if you live in the inner city, if you live in suburbia. Do you know that even your getting dressed for church on Sunday morning - there are neighbors round about you who take notice that you're going somewhere on a Sunday morning.....they presume you're going to church. And

even this in itself is an act of witnessing. You're riding in a carpool to work tomorrow....the accent that you bring to the conversation that claims the group, even the kind of conversation you begin, can be a witnessing for Jesus Christ.

C We have been having very meaningful small group sessions at Bethany on Saturday night, especially being set aside this month for those highly-prized young people of our congregation, among them the seniors in high school. A week ago last night as I sat with a small group I said to them in the course of the conversation, "As you end one chapter in your life and you begin a new chapter, be daring, be brave, be creative. Don't hesitate to launch out into something new for Christ." And they thought, of course, that I was talking about new vocations, new occupations in which a man can witness for Christ.and then, bless her soul, one of the girls, who is looking forward to being married next December, who with the man who claims her heart has already come to talk to me about it, said very carefully and very properly, and quite earnestly, "But, Pastor, I'm looking forward to being married. What I want most in my life right now is to have a home, to be a loving mate to my husband, and then maybe some day, if God permits it, to have children. Dare I believe this to be as important as these other things that you have been saying?" God bless her, of course she has a right to believe it, and who knows, even more so. Any man who has had an experience of Jesus Christ, with what he has, wherever he may be.....

....and the longer I live, and the more I associate with people, the more I recognize the opportunity which God gives us to witness for Christ within the confines of the family circle, with those who are nearest to us, with those, presumably, who should be dearest to us. Here is the built-in

opportunity to share the love of God in Christ. As a Pastor, the longer I stay in the parish the more I recognize the sterling worth of the example of a father and a mother upon a child. Time and again in Catechetical Class I am able to see reflected by the child the kind of spiritual nurturing they have been receiving from their parents.....and every now and then I know an ache in my heart when I know what they should have had and they haven't gotten.

Any man.....with what he has.....wherever he may be, can witness for Jesus Christ. I don't know how it may be with you, but I am forced to admit that in the final analysis I might never have known about Jesus Christ if it hadn't been for certain people. To this very moment, when I think of God, I hear certain voices.....I see certain faces.

* * *

Prayer

What have we, O God, that we have not received? Surely Thou art a God who gives, who reveals Himself, who speaks plainly. Grant that we may hear Thee aright, and in our hearing be motivated to share with others what we know to be true, even the salvation of our souls. O God, watch by the sick, enrich the poor, be Thou very near to any who is prone to walk without Thee, and if it please Thee, use us as agents, ministers, witnesses.

OUR FATHER.....

"THE SPIRIT-POSSESSED"

The sermon entitled, "The Spirit-Possessed", is based upon the Epistle for the day; and the text is the 4th verse of the 2nd chapter of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles:

"And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost
and began to speak with other tongues, as the
Spirit gave them utterance."

There's a great deal to be said for returning to one's alma mater, especially when that school on the hill has been your mothering-place in the Lord. And so with understandable delight I went back to Gettysburg this past week. Oh, I'll grant you, the primary purpose was to attend and to participate in the annual Convention of the Maryland Synod sessions, yet ever so often I was able to pass by certain buildings, to look up and think of certain rooms, particularly when I went by Old Dorm, which, a quarter of a century ago, housed under one roof practically the entire student body.

In passing by such a revered spot it was an easy thing to hear voices and to see faces, and to remember the things that transpired there of an extracurricular fashion, when time should have been given, perhaps, to the preparation of lessons. There was always the session in somebody's room, the seemingly endless kind of conversation, when, of course, without a doubt, we solved all the problems in the world, fashioned new schools of thought, went into greatly unexplored territory. For the moment I am thinking particularly of my friend and fellow classmate, Henry Snyder, Jr. Ever so often when we gathered together, Henry would lay down his thesis, and he'd defend it with vigor.

What was his thesis? - that we make a mistake when we say that the twelve

disciples were plain ordinary people, that Jesus just happened to see them, and what He said to Matthew and Andrew He might just as well have said to anybody. Henry said, this is wrong. He said the twelve were not plain, ordinary people, they were extraordinary folk. They were the ones with the leadership potential, they were the people of promise. Well, this might be new to you. Maybe you, too, abide by those who say that the twelve were just plain, ordinary people.

I have to admit, and if you'll permit me to tell it to you, there are times when I fully agreed with him; because if one is going to be a leader, then he must bring leadership characteristic and qualification to the role of a leader. If one is just plain, ordinary, then how can one provide the leadership that the plain, ordinary require and need?

But be that as it may, the thing that needs to be said now, and when it is said there is no argument, because it's something that all of us will readily recognize: the important thing in discipleship is not what we bring to Jesus, not so much what we are.....the important thing is what God in Christ brings to us!....

...not what we are, but what He makes of us....

...not the people we happen to be, but the people He knows
we can become.

Now with that as a prefatory statement, let me deal at once with the text for today's sermon:

"And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost
and began to speak with other tongues, as the
Spirit gave them utterance."

.....I am reading your mind aright? If you're giving this any kind of sober thought, you are saying at once, "Pastor, that's a bit fuzzy for me. I can't quite see it in sharp focus, this spirit business.".....and you and I have a way

of shying away from it. We are inclined at times to call people odd and peculiar who say they have been possessed by the Spirit.....and particularly if you deal with what happened then on the day of Pentecost, how these people came together, representing different nationalities and different tongues, yet when they began to speak, each in his own tongue, everybody understood what was being said!

That leaves us a bit mystified. So we shy away from it - - this whole matter of being spirit-possessed.....this whole matter of being a people with an experience.

Yesterday, making a hospital call, I visited with a man who was not a member of this congregation, but he attends with marked regularity. And in the course of the conversation he volunteered to say, 'I'm not a member of your congregation, Pastor, but it means a great deal to attend the services in Saint Luke Congregation.'....."but," he said, "I suppose you wonder why I have never presented myself for membership. I'll tell you very frankly - - "

(people oftentimes speak very frankly when
they're flat on the back in a hospital bed)

.....he said, "I've heard you say something about an experience, that it is possible to have the indelible mark of God upon the fabric of your heart. Frankly, Pastor, I don't know that I understand what you're talking about when you say it. I'm a very ordinary person - - I've never had what you might call an experience with the Lord. Oh, I know that I love Him, I know that I respect Him, I know that I have to fear Him - - " (these are his words) - - "but I don't know what you mean by an experience."

Maybe you feel that way when you come to these words that describe the experience of Pentecost. You can't quite understand this mysterious sound, "as of a rushing mighty wind", and then people react, and everyone who is present seems

to feel, with complete certainty, the undeniable fact of God. Well, why don't you be honest with yourself and admit that you don't understand? The first thing that God requires of any man is complete honesty.

And the second thing in that reaction, why don't you do what some of us have learned to do -- accept the fact of mystery. You've heard me say it before: if you could fully understand the mind of God, then you would be equal with God. There's nothing wrong with this respectful kind of distance that naturally takes place between you and God....and will you let me say it very boldly -- there's nothing wrong with a kind of reverent agnosticism when you frankly admit there are some things that you don't know. It's presumption to say that you and I know everything there is to know about God.

Why, you don't know everything there is to know about yourself. Each one of us finds at times that moment when he has to admit that he is a mystery to himself....

..."Why in heaven's name did I say what I did?"

...."Why did I do what I did?"

...."Why did I react like that? -- I can't understand it."

....this is a language that is not alien to you, is it?

All right, let us say there is this kind of mystery about this day of Pentecost, when a group of people were gathered together, and then they went out, not being able to fully understand it, but they said, "God". They were spirit-possessed. What can I tell you about it? -- within these limitations, let me tell you at least three things.

The people who had this experience were ordinary people, people like you, people like me.....unlettered, far from being wealthy, not enjoying a great deal of prestige and position -- -- there wasn't a single one in this group present

whose name was listed in the "Who's Who" of that generation....fishermen, tax-collectors, some of them who had even had trouble with the law - some of them were rebels - some of them were very, very impatient with things as they were, and they had revolution in their eyes, and they heard the voice of the new Messiah. But by and large, they were plain, ordinary people, on whom the Spirit poured His grace. This I can tell you about it. This was not a gathering just of the twelve. This was a gathering of a mighty band, who took upon themselves the name "believers".

Now the second thing I can tell you about them is this: these who received the out-pouring of the Spirit, the ones who had this experience, they were sinners - - every single one of them. Among them were the ones who had denied Jesus Christ, they had run away from Him, they lived with the fact of their sin, they were haunted by it, they were plagued by it, they were disturbed by it. Then, as over against that, here was this figure of Jesus Christ who came back to them, who found them where they were, in their frustration and in their failure He came to them, as much as to say, "I wanted you to know that I know exactly what you are, and I know exactly what you did, but as far as I am concerned, I will never leave you, I will not forsake you - - "

Let me tell you again - - you've heard it ever since I came to you, I can't say it any better, and it's something that needs to be repeated.....nothing, absolutely nothing can ever cut asunder the bond of love that God has for us.

And so to these people who are the sinners, who came back and wanted to get rid of their sins, they wanted to surrender their sin, they wanted to get rid of it..now, in the face of so great love - - they were the ones who had this experience.

I do not say this to rebuke you, any more than I chastize my own soul, but

C if you and I lack this experience with God it could be that we've never come into His presence with our sins and said, "Here! I surrender my sins!" The last thing in the world that some of us ever want to get rid of is our sins -- we enjoy them too much! They bring us secret pleasure. Damnable as they may be, we go on clinging to them -- oh, foolishly so! -- even blaspheming God by thinking that we can go on sinning and then always there will be another day, when we get older -- and somehow equate virtue with old age, when we'll turn to the Lord and say, "Forgive us"....and then those great big strong loving arms will gather us all up together and say, "I love you -- I forgive you"....

Oand so we go on, sinners, gamblers that we are, and always thinking that we can keep putting it off and enjoy our sins, until just before! -- this is human nature.

P I'm reminding you that the people who had this experience with God, upon whom the Spirit came -- they were the ones who said, "Forgive"...they were the ones who afterward, Peter could say to them, "Confess your sins -- ask that they be forgiven, and then receive the power of the Holy Spirit."

Y And that's the last thing to be said about these people: they were the ones, then, upon whom the Holy Spirit came, and when the Spirit visited them they were empowered by the things of God....

....from that moment on, they were the God-directed
....from that moment on, they were the God-motivated
....from that moment on, they were the people who were
filled with the Spirit of God.

As a Pastor, with what blessed responsibility God gives me, I deal with people. And what do I sometimes find? -- people filled with all kinds of things. Some people I know, some people you know, who are filled with hatred, who are

filled with jealousy, who are filled with prejudice, who are filled with selfishness.....and then, God be thanked, every now and then I meet people - - like this page in the Acts of the Apostles, who are filled with God, who are filled with His Spirit. And that's enough to keep any man going another day, to know that it's possible.

Will you listen now very carefully to this last sentence or two in this sermon:

....it is possible to be the Spirit-possessed

....it is possible to have God fill your life

.....and if you want it to happen, it can happen to you.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"GOD IS LOVE"

The sermon bearing the title "God is Love" is based upon the Epistle for the day; and the text is the 16th verse of the 4th chapter of 1 John:

"And we have known and believed the love that God
hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth
in love dwelleth in God, and God in him."

Christians have always been making extravagant claims. They have a way of saying the boldest things, and particularly about the God in whom they believe.

You see, we come to this text as people who are inside the Faith, we do not come as people who are outside. We can't remember a day when we hadn't heard these words. We can't remember a time when we did not believe them. Come wind or weather, for the most part there's been enough basic trust in you and me that we've never allowed ourselves to go forever doubting the fact of God or His basic nature and character. We are the ones who are in complete agreement with these words.

But suppose you were not of the Faith? Suppose you would have gone with me those many months ago, so it seems now, to a land where 450 million people live, and less than 2% of them are Christian; and that no matter where you might walk, you would always be surrounded by people who do not believe in Jesus Christ, who do not believe that God is love. And then one day, perchance, they ask you, they say, "Tell us about your god -- what's he like? Do you honestly believe there is a God?"

And then you, mark you, you say to people who do not believe as you believe -- you say what appears to them now as a very preposterous thing

"Yes, there is a God. And what is more, we know this

God -- and let me tell you one thing more...we know

what He is like. He is love. We know that He loves us, and we know that when we love one another, this God lives in us!"

Now let me tell you this -- you talk to anybody like this who is not of your persuasion, you talk to anybody like this who has not been schooled in the Faith as you've been schooled, and in all likelihood he'll say this about you, that you are either ignorant, or he'll say you are arrogant. He will say it takes an ignorant man to say that there is a God and that he knows precisely the basic nature and character of this God. He'll say --

"Brother, you don't know what you're talking about!

Ponder the kind of world in which we live! It's rank presumption for any human being to say that there is a God -- "

...he'll say to you, and he honestly believes what he's telling you, that it's absolutely impossible for finite man to know the infinite -- that it's impossible for anybody who is human to know the one who is divine....you're never going to be on the same wave length. It's impossible for man to think the thoughts of God, for to do this, you see, is to bring God down to our level. Even though he may be a pagan, he is still the kind of person who wants a god, perchance, to stay outside his reach, because he wants a god who is over and above and beyond him. Pagan though he may be, he's not so sure that he can do business with a god that can be understood, who can be known.

So the man outside the Faith says to those of us who treasure these words, "God is love -- we know it! -- He lives in our hearts! -- " ...he says,

"You don't know what you're talking about, and what is

more, you're an arrogant thing. Why, it's folly for a man to be that foolish! - - to believe that of all the billions of people who have ever lived, that God, now, whatever his nature and character may be, that this God knows that you exist, that at night when you say your prayers - are you foolish enough to believe that God gives his undivided attention to you? - - are you willing to believe that God knows who you are, and granted he knows what you are, that he cares? It's rank presumption for a human being, one out of billions of people, to say, 'I know God, and I know He loves me'."

One doesn't have to go to India to find this kind of talk. It could be that if our service were so structured, that immediately after the benediction was pronounced, some of us could gather together in a room and we'd have a "talk-it-over" period, and you questioned the preacher, and you raised objection to certain schools of thought that he represents. We who are surrounded by a generation of technicians and scientists - - even in our day - - your friend, your neighbor, the man who rides with you in the carpool, the man who may even share your own table, who may live where you live.....as a product of this generation may say, when one thinks of a macroscopic world, when one thinks of the microscopic world, what is man - against the world that's infinitely large, or against this world that's infinitely small? No wonder Bertram Russell says that there's no hope for man, he's an insignificant thing, and it's folly for him to believe otherwise.

What will you do with this, my friend? You can't say it was different for

the early Christians because their world was different, it was less scientific....
...but don't forget for a single minute - - they had all the pressures of a world
in political and economic and social disorder. And any one among them would be
willing to admit, if it had not been for Jesus Christ, his life would have no
meaning. Now when the early church began talking about God they did make these
extravagant claims. They said, "We know Him, and we also know that He loves us."

Now if one were to say only three words about God, I'm willing to wager,
if I were a gambling man, that you'd have to use the very same words that they
chose - - three words -- three perfect words -- three complete words -- three
most precious words - - you'd say the same thing that John did: "God is love."

But where did they get that idea? This is the question that you and I
have to ask. If they believed it, how can I believe it? For after it's all
said and done, this is the thing that you and I want most, to believe that there
is a God, and to believe that God pays some attention to me. In James Baldwin's
work, "Blues For Mr. Charlie" there is this very delicate moment, when all hope
seems to have been swept from the scene, and two people engage in dialogue.....
...the one man says to the other, "Are you really my friend?"this is the
kind of thing that man is always saying when he turns toward God, wondering if
God is his friend, wondering if God pays any attention to him, wondering if God
feels kindly disposed toward him.

It's as contemporary as the last counselling period that I had, the day
before yesterday. He might be worshipping with us right now, I'm not sure. He
isn't a member of this congregation, but repeatedly he's marked the path that leads
to this place. I'm not betraying a confidence. What I'm going to tell you are his
words and by his admission.....he's decided to go away. He's not sure

where he's going to go. For the moment he doesn't much care. He says the facts of life have been working against him, the determinative forces in his life have been the forces outside, and they haven't been friendly,....and his lot right now isn't a very pleasant one. So he's going somewhere.....

....unashamedly, without reservation, I tell you this -- in any relationship in this kind of encounter with another soul, I try never to forget who, in the sight of God, I am meant to be.....within the limitations which I know so well, I ask God to speak some word, through me, to any unsettled, troubled soul.....

....so I tried to make plain to him that God takes note of his condition, that God is interested in him, that until he lines up his life according to God's pattern, he'll never know anything else except unsettlement, and utter frustration..and that even though one may have to admit that life has a way of throwing certain colors into our life -- we may not be able to choose this, we may not be able to decide what it is that's going to happen to us, but by the Grace of God, we can determine what we're going to do with what happens to us.....

That's the kind of thing that we talked about as he went out the door, only for him to say again, the thing I hoped he would not have said.....

"You believe it -- -- I don't."

How does one get to believe it? How can one have this experience with God that he trusts? How did the early Christians get it? They got it because of their relationship with Jesus Christ. They could never forget who Jesus Christ was and what He did, and whenever they thought of Jesus Christ they invariably thought about God.

And I'll tell you why. We can't think of God aside from Jesus Christ! If we're going to begin where everybody else seems to begin, with God as a spirit --

-- can you see a spirit? can you describe a spirit?

...listen carefully....

....you never really know what a person is until you see what He does. Character finds its fullest expression in what a man does. What you and I know about God we know because of what we've seen Him do in Jesus Christ....

Jesus is God - demonstrated!

Jesus is God in love acted out!

...that's exactly what it was, when those Palestinian folks saw Christ, when they saw and they heard and they observed Jesus Christ in action -- they had only one word for it -- - - GOD.

And what was He like, this Jesus Christ? They weren't as eloquent as some of you might be, but they had a beautiful way of putting it -- they said, "He's a friend of sinners." They could never think of Him when He was anything less than gracious, less than loving.

Now there are those who tell me that they can't believe certain things until they can experience them. That's what this chap said to me -- "Well you've had an experience and I haven't." But it's also folly to believe that unless you have an experience you cannot accept it. Let me give you a very simple illustration: I do not doubt for a single minute the fact of smallpox. I've never had smallpox. Why, then, do I accept the fact of smallpox? ...because I have seen the marks on the skin of those who have been afflicted. This is evidence enough.

The analogy is not a bad one. I have never seen Jesus Christ, Mary's son, the itinerant carpenter's son....I have never seen Him as the man who slept beneath Judean stars. But I have seen people who in their lives had the marks of Jesus Christ, who in their daily life have shown me how it's possible for God to dwell and to live in a person.

This is the frightening thing about this very comforting thought - -
'God is love' - - and mark you, we have been made in His image. That means we, too, should be an expression of love. Are we? Is the quality of love the very thing that people think about at the mention of your name? Make no mistake about it, one always takes a risk when he loves. He could trust too much. He could trust too willingly. He might never get a return.

In "Blues For Mr. Charlie" there is also this line, where one man says to another man's girl, after the man dies, "I will be good to you"....and in this strange work, that shifts between various shades of light and dark, there is that wholesome moment where she responds to a man who says, "I will be good to you." Barbara Chapin has written about this, and when she writes she says, 'I've never seen anything else quite like it, unless it might have been in that Japanese play that was written right after Hiroshimo.....a priest had learned all about the brutality of the people....he had known all about man's inhumanity to man; and the priest holds in his arms a baby, symbol of life....and there is a peasant reaching out for the child. And here is the great moment when the priest, who represents God, must decide - - 'In a generation of brutality, in a social order of man's inhumanity to man, can I trust this child into the life of this peasant?'.....and then he remembers that, unless he does, life may stop.

We who are meant to reflect something of God's love in Christ always run the risk. But God gives no alternative. He didn't use any for Himself.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

C
O LORD OUR GOD, Who hast bidden the light to shine out of darkness,
and Who hast again brought us to this, Thy house of prayer, to
praise Thy goodness and to ask for Thy Grace, accept now in Thy
endless mercy the sacrifice of our worship and thanksgiving, and
grant unto us all such requests as may be wholesome for us.

O
Make us to be children of the Light, to understand so well that
we were not only meant to walk in Love, but also to share that
Love.

P
Forgive each of us his sin, cleanse us by Thy Grace, find us always
obedient children. Watch over all whom we love, wherever they may
be. Keep before us the hope of Heaven.

Y
OUR FATHER.....

(Prayer following sermon "God is Love" - 6/20/65)

"THE FEAR OF THE LORD"

The sermon bearing the title, "The Fear of The Lord", is based upon the Old Testament lesson for the Day; and the text is the 10th verse of the 9th chapter of the Book of Proverbs:

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."

He was a sensitive soul, and he came to our shores from another land. He came with only one purpose in mind, and that was to assess something of the American mind, mood and spirit.

This is what he did. He stayed for a while in our big cities. He saw the shows on Broadway. Then he traveled around throughout America. He listened to the conversations taking place in the terminals, the bus terminal, the train terminal, the air terminal. He read the newspapers, even including the comic strips. He listened intently to the commentators on radio and television. Then he went back home, and he wrote a book.

This is what he said in his book: impressed as he was by much that he saw and felt in America, he said there was something missing. He did not feel at any time, that is, with any degree of intensity, that we were a people who had eternal longing. By that he meant, of course, that we were a people who did not concern ourselves much beyond this materialistic world. He said there was one thing lacking in America, and the one thing lacking became the title for his book: "The Eternal Dimension". I prize the book very much, so much so that I read it again and ever so often. It's the one book that I won't tuck away in some back corner of my book-shelf - - it has to be kept within reach for occa-

sional reading.

C
My first reaction, however, was that this was a man from another land. He undoubtedly came with a prejudiced eye to begin with. But now I'm a bit more sober in my evaluation of his judgment, particularly so that the latest Gallup Poll which deals with the mind, the mood and the spirit of America, concerning itself primarily with our morality, comes also almost to the same conclusion, but not in the same terms. Let me tell you a little bit about the samplings, or rather the way the samplings have been analyzed.

O
We are a people, so the pollster tells us, who have practically everything. And because we have practically everything, we are a people somewhat unafraid. In fact, the writer came to the conclusion in his article that not very many people can we find anywhere who have any great fear....

P
...mark you, less than 10% of the people sampled have a
fear of ill health

...in this day and age when we talk about automation, they
found only 9% who felt that their jobs might be taken
away from them, and they would be displaced

Y
...as high as 75% of the people went on record that their
incomes had increased the past five years and they had
reason to believe that they would get salary increases
in the next five years that lie ahead....

...it's a rather surprising thing to discover that 75% of
the people who earn less than three thousand dollars a
year were somewhat satisfied!

.....and then perhaps the most serious of all the indictments, the comment of

the wife of a Pennsylvania coal miner who said, "It seems that no matter what situation may arise, we're able to handle it" -- if not a proud boast, at least an indication of satisfaction....we trust our management. Occasionally we may criticize our elected officials, but by and large the mood is one of calm and confidence.

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It is, according to the writer of this article, an age of overpowering optimism. There are those who tell us that we are a people who are anxious, they tell us we are a people who are distraught and frustrated, and yet here is the latest sampling for you, my friend. And then the man concludes his article with saying that no matter what else may be said, the balance sheet seems to be rather favorable in these soaring, these surging Sixties, as we've reached already the mid-point! And as I put the article aside, I think of my friend from across the waters whom I've never met -- the eternal dimension is lacking.....the substance of the latest Gallup Poll -- we are a fairly satisfied people.

Y
Who thinks of God when one is young? "For if the mood of America today suggests anything, it is that the older we become as a nation -- and even with greater numbers of older people -- yet the younger becomes our national outlook. Fifteen years ago, the median age was 30.2 years. Today it is 27.8 years. Fifteen years from now it will be 25.5 years."

Who needs God?....when a man has almost anything that he wants, or needs. Earth-bound creatures that we are -- a second car on the driveway, perhaps...a second home in the country, or a place at the shore -- who say the next five years look very promising!!!....

Who needs God?....when everything seems to be going so well, when someone can say, "No matter what situation arises, we're going to be able to handle it."

I tell you, it's a rather frightening thing - - frightening thing because God never made us to be so satisfied. God never intended that the day would come when we could rule Him out of the picture. You may find it difficult for the moment to relate what I'm going to tell you now with what I've been saying, but every now and then there are those of us who admit that we're haunted by something that we heard. When I first went to Europe shortly after World War II, in broken English she said to me, somewhere in Germany....

"People who have always had enough to eat

just don't know what it is to be hungry - - "

.....and some of us have lived long enough to know that not until you are hungry do you appreciate food.....not until you run the risk of losing something do you begin to appreciate what it was really meant to be.

I have never presumed to know the mind of God. I reach for this, and I reach for that, and I am grateful for this insight and this degree of perception.....but if I can read Him aright, even at so great distance, I'm willing to say to you right now that we must never forget the very first lesson that God taught us about Himself.

The basic lesson that God taught the children of men concerning His nature and character is this: "I am to be feared." He spelled it out this way in one of the Commandments - - "I am the Lord thy God; thou shalt have no other gods before me." To the children of men God said, "There must never come a time when you can rid me from your thoughts - - there must never come a time when you must feel I am no account." So God as He begins to teach the children of men says,

"I am the Lord thy God"

....and again and ever so often in all of His dealings with them He gave them to understand that He was to be feared....

.... and that there was to be, if you'll let me put it this way, a respectful distance between God and man.

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O
Now what kind of people are we? Our friend from across the waters says we are a people that rule God out of the picture -- the dimension isn't there! ...for we could become a people who, when we think of God, have become so chummy with Him, we drag Him down to our own level, and there is no respectful distance between God and man.....when we can write such songs as "Somebody Up There Loves Me".....when we can easily refer to God as "the Man Upstairs" -- it's a cheapening of this relationship. This has to be said about many of us: either we don't take Him into account, or if we do, we fraternize with Him. And when you begin to fraternize with God you cheapen a relationship that was meant to be held in awe and respect.

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And a long, long time ago, before Jesus Christ, a wise man said, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom".....and the first thing to be said about fear is that it takes someone or something into account. When you fear someone or something, you recognize that it exists. And maybe that's the way God had to deal with the children of men in their early spiritual development, that they might never forget that He was there. And so the first thing He said: "You must fear me."

Now there are different kinds of fear. There is the fear that we have for someone because we take stock of ourselves, and we consider ourselves running scared when we think of our relationship to God or the thing that stands for God. We're never quite certain, and some of us become afraid when we're not quite certain. This is why we panic, you see, and panic is a kind of fear, a deadly kind of fear, because it can be so crippling. We're not so sure how

it's going to come out. I'm not so certain that God particularly had this in mind when He said to us that we were to fear Him - - that He wanted us to always be surrounded with a cloud of uncertainty.

Sometimes we're afraid when we don't know people. We do keep our distance from them, because we're not certain how they think, we're not certain how they're going to react. Does God want us to have this kind of fear concerning Him? And yet I say to you ever so quickly - - I don't know that I could worship a God if I could always figure Him out. And yet down deep inside my heart there's something that clamors for some kind of prediction that can be trusted, when it comes to dealing with the nature and character of God. And all of this leads me to tell you that one day God sent to earth Jesus Christ. And ever so often Jesus Christ in His dealings with people said - -

"Fear not - - " "Fear not - - "

Preacher, do you talk out of both sides of your mouth at one time? Are we or are we not to fear? What now shall we make of it?

Jesus Christ establishes the fact that God is a God of love - - - but a God of holy love - - a God who loves at a price - - a God whose love requires that He suffers with those whom He loves.....not a God who is detached, but a God who becomes involved. Then says Jesus Christ, "Fear not - - your God is not tyrannical; your God does not delight in punishing the wicked - - your God delights in the salvation of a sinner!

So you see, a man is to be known by the things he fears. Tell me your fears, my friend, and I'll tell you the kind of character you are. The Gallup Poll, however, reminds us that we haven't many fears that are valid. We hardly have any fears at all. And when you say that, you say that we are a people who don't even fear God!

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It is to the everlasting credit of the reformer, Martin Luther, that he seldom if ever thought of the things of God without those Ewin words. Remember them from your catechetical days? -- "we should so fear and love God -- " We talk a bit feebly about the latter these days. But where is the man who says he fears the wrath of God?where's the man who says, "I fear the Day of Judgment - " - - - ?

This could be the saddest thing that's said about our generation....

...we are a people for whom Hell has no terror,

and Heaven no invitation - - - .

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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We are told, you see, that we are a people "who bear themselves like victory-addicted champions. We've won our wars and survived our depressions. We are accustomed to meeting, and beating tests. We are experienced pragmatists, buoyed by a system that works. We believe in our managers." The national magazine of very recent issue which so reported also went on to add the very indicting remark of a Pennsylvania coal miner's wife who declared - - "I feel we live in a country where most situations can be handled" - - - and maintained the writer - - "she could be speaking for multitudes"!

Assessing our age, can we really call it the "age of anxiety"? By and large we are a people who are somewhat calm and confident. Listen to these findings, if you will:

"Seventy-three per cent are at least 'fairly' optimistic about prospects in the year ahead - - twenty-six per cent of them very much so. Seventy-four per cent are at least 'considerably' or 'extremely' satisfied with their lives; 68% with their work; 60% with their achievement and 71% with their community status. 85% of Americans are also 'considerably' or 'extremely' satisfied with their home life. Even 75% of those Americans making \$3,000 a year or less say they are happy with home and family.

C
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"Other than war and personal finances, few things really perturb Americans today. Only 10% fear ill-health; only 6% fear crime and violence. With all the talk in recent years about the threat of automation, you might expect some apprehension about job security. There is almost none. Only 9% of Americans think it 'likely' that the job of the family bread-winner will be threatened by automation in the next five years. Laborers show just slightly more concern than professionals. "The thing I fear most is not finding a girlfriend," a N. Hollywood, California, mechanic admits. And one in four Americans maintain that they fear nothing at all."

(LOOK Magazine - 6/29/65)

"GOD'S GREATER LOVE"

The sermon, based upon the Gospel lesson for the day, bears the title, "God's Greater Love" and the text is the 10th verse of the 15th chapter of Luke:

"Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy
in the presence of the angels of God
over one sinner that repenteth."

It wasn't planned that way, but it's just as well that the sermon title did not appear in the bulleting that you have in your hands, for in all likelihood as you would have read it for the first time you would have resented the very thought. You have a right to take issue with this title "God's Greater Love" -- for haven't you been told to believe that God's love is constant, that His love is always everywhere and to anyone the same; that one thing you can't do when you talk about the love of God is to talk about quality other than its true nature, or to talk about degrees of God's love. I make bold to choose a title as I have, deliberately so -- "God's Greater Love." But be kind enough, will you, to hear me out. You can well afford to do it, because I think there's a point here that you ought not to ignore.

Now it's not an easy thing to talk about God at any time, because of who we are and because of who He is. Let me say it again -- you've memorized it by this time, haven't you? --

....He is infinite -- we are finite

....He is divine -- we are human

....He is God -- we are His children

How can any of us ever fully understand what He is? -- or who He is?and especially now when you come to talk about that most wonderful of all things -- the

love of God.

C When we do begin to deal with the love of God I think there are two understandable reactions. One is: the love of God - - incredible - - impossible! ...you just can't make me believe that God loves me, that God pays any attention to me. I can believe in an impersonal force, I can believe in God's creative act - - I can believe in some great power....but then, preacher, to have you come along and to say that you can personalize this power, that you can personalize this force, you can even use such a word as love when you think of God who is spirit? Not so! This is one reaction.

O The other is, oddly enough: Sure, God loves me! I am sure that He loves me. I'm not so sure that He loves anybody else, but I am sure He loves me.

Pand then you deal with a breed of people who accept this wonderful, magnanimous thing called love, and they box it in, circumscribe it, and whenever they talk about God's love they talk about themselves and only themselves...or perchance if they are in an extravagant mood, they'll talk about other people, but always other people just like them - - "I have no trouble with the love of God. He belongs to me, and my kind."

Y It's an unfortunate thing that people generally react in either of these ways, not to accept the love of God, or to selfishly accept it. Each can be detrimental.

Would you permit me to tell you that when our Lord was here on earth He had His moments when He became infuriated with us. As I planned next year's sermons between September and June I've already chosen a title for one: "The Enangered Christ." He does have His moments when He becomes annoyed by us. And today's Gospel lesson is an example. For there were scribes and Pharisees

C who, when they thought of God, couldn't quite understand a God whose love would be great enough to take in everybody. The scribes and the Pharisees believed their God belonged to them, and only to their kind. And then this itinerant carpenter's son comes along, and He seeks out the outcast -- goes looking for them -- deliberately goes out of His way to find them! -- and then identifies with them.....and there's no surer way to identify with people in the Near East than to sit down and break bread with them. And the scribes and the Pharisees saw this carpenter's son doing this very thing, and so they began to murmur and to say, "Look at him -- look at him!"

O And then He really shocked them. It was now not only what they saw Him do, but now they had to listen to Him interpret what He was doing. And He told them three stories.

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Y Story number one: Once there was a shepherd who had one hundred sheep, and each sheep was valuable. He was charged with the responsibility of every single sheep. And as his custom was, he brought them home at night to the protective shelter of the fold, a lean-to type of arrangement, perhaps, with three sides, open on one side, in front of which he himself would lie down to kind of act as a door.....or it might be a hole in the side of a hill or a cave.....and as he led them there he counted: "ninety-seven, ninety-eight, ninety-nine -- -- " ...in the morning there had been a hundred. Now he can only count ninety-nine. He makes the ninety-nine secure, puts somebody else in charge, then he himself goes out in the black of the night and keeps looking and looking and looking until he finds it....

....I wish you could travel in the Near East -- I wish all of you could have stemmed from Near Eastern stock. The imagery is excellent....

....the shepherd comes back with

the sheep around his shoulders. He fairly runs, and he shouts to the people that he sees in the distance - "I've found him! I've found him! I've found him!" And they, realizing a similar plight, rejoice with him.

Then Jesus, who is telling this story, says,

"And you know what? - that's what God is like!

When something that belongs to God is lost, God can't be content by Himself and with whatever He has. God Himself will go out and look and look and look, and even at great cost to Himself keep seeking until He finds it, and then He brings it back. There's rejoicing in Heaven!"

He told them a second story: There was a woman who had ten silver coins. Carelessly perhaps, she lost one. She literally turns the house inside out until she finds it - - she won't give up until she finds it. Then she runs up and down the street, going to one house right after another - - "Rejoice with me! - I've found it! - it's no longer lost!"

And Jesus said,

"You know what? God's like that! When God loses something He can't be content. He Himself goes looking. He is the Great Seeker...and He keeps looking until He finds it. And then there's rejoicing!"

He gave them a third story: There was a man who had two sons. One of them, the young rebel and the rascal, turns his back upon home and goes out into the far country and gets lost. The neighbors used to shake their head when they saw the old man, every day just like clock-work, going out and looking down the lane, trying to see if something might be there in the distance

that resembled anything like....a prodigal son. And then one night, sure enough! -- discernible in the distance there it was! -- it -- he had lost his humanity. And the old man runs, falls upon his son, and there's rejoicing.

Jesus said,

"You know what? God's like that!

When God loses something that belongs to Him He can't be content. He Himself will go look for it and He keeps looking until He finds it, and when He finds it, there's rejoicing."

Now do you see why I've made bold to use the title, "God's Greater Love"? -- the greater love that's characterized by the fact that it's a seeking love, it's a suffering love, it's a longing love. Not that He doesn't love those who are secure and safe....not that He loves us less. But for something that's been lost there's a different kind of concern.

Let me now with one grand stroke justify the choice of the title to the sermon. You'll find it in the woman's answer, a mother who had been asked that most delicate of all questions -- (how could one be foolish enough to ask a mother a question such as this?) } --

"Of all your children, whom do you love most?"

The mother had an immediate reply:

"Of all my children whom do I love most? -- the one who is farthest away from home until he returns;

Of all my children whom do I love most? -- the one who is sick, until he gets well -- "this, if you please, is

a mother's greater love. This, if you please, justifies the title, "God's Greater Love".....the love that seeks and the love that suffers and the love that knows no content until the lost is found and the sick is made well, and the sinner is saved.

C I have not come to this sacred desk this morning to tell you how it is that people become lost. I could. Each of these stories indicates the ways by which people become lost. It's enough to say that some become lost recklessly, foolishly, some become lost willfully and deliberately. I suppose I should never have done it in the first place, but a Christmas or so ago I went shopping. I wanted to get Winifred a gift, and I took her charge plate. The purchase was made. I reached for the charge plate. It wasn't there. I had lost it. You can imagine my anxiety. Quickly, anxiously I retraced my every step back to the parking lot, with searching eyes every step of the way. P Fortunately I found it -- found something that really didn't belong to me.... yet it was in my possession, and when I regained it I rejoiced.

Y The Scriptures tell us that God has a concern for every single soul, and if any single soul should become lost God Himself is aware of it, and seeks until it's found. Honestly now, do you really believe it? We who live in so great a world -- we're told that the world in which we live is but one among many. There are those who tell us that even if our earth were to burn up or to drop out of the heavens itself, it would be no more than a single leaf fluttering to the ground in an autumn wind.

Dare I believe that God in Heaven above pays any attention to us here on earth, to our earth? Isn't it presumption to believe that ours should be a favored planet?...and then to believe that when I say my prayers at night and I get down on my knees, and I allow myself the luxury of the thought that God in Heaven above says, "Yes, Raymond, what is it?" -- dare I believe that God

gives me, seemingly, His undivided attention?

This is the trouble with our day. We're afraid to believe it. And when we're afraid to believe it, man denies himself the high value that God has placed upon a human soul. Antoine de Saint Exupery, writing his letter to a general, do you remember what he says --

"Ah, there is only one problem, only one in all the world.

How can we restore to man a spiritual significance, a spiritual discontent; let something descend upon them like the dew of a Gregorian chant.

-- Don't you see, we cannot live any longer on refrigerators, politics, balance sheets, and cross-word puzzles. We simply cannot."

I say to you, it's the problem, how can a man really see himself as a child of God, for whom God has an unending concern?

Man has a way of getting lost. This means estrangement, it means being out of proper relationship. I should have begun the sermon by telling you that if you've never lost anything, and have never known the joy of finding it, or if you yourself think that, honestly now, you're in perfect relationship with God and with your fellowman, and even with yourself -- that you have no appreciation for the word lost at all.....then this sermon has no meaning for you at all.

But when Jesus was here on earth He was forever looking for someone, and when He found someone He permitted them to believe that the bond of love between God and them could not be broken. God is the Great Seeker, because He knows that whatever is lost has to be searched for. There are some things that cannot be re-discovered by themselves. Somebody has to look for them.

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Beloved, if by any chance you're lost, know the comfort of the thought, will you, that God's out looking for you. He is the veritable "Hound of the Heaven" -- He will not give up. That should mean something to you, shouldn't it? As the child that was lost suddenly knew a sense of peace when he kept telling them at the police desk, "But my daddy will know that I'm lost, and he'll come looking for me!"

Beloved, if you should admit that you're lost, God's on His way -- He'll find you.

.....and now to all the rest of us:

-- how does God find people?

...sometimes He uses you and me to go looking for them.

So this sermon ends with a question:

-- are you looking for anyone, anyone for God?

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

The sermon is based upon the Gospel lesson for the day. It could well carry the title, "A Sermon For Every One of Us"; and the text, from the 6th chapter of Luke, the 36th and 37th verses:

"Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father
also is merciful.
Judge not, and ye shall not be judged:
condemn not, and ye shall not be con-
demned: for give, and ye shall be forgiven."

Tell me now, honestly, at what point is it that our religious experience bogs down? Isn't it primarily in the area of our relationship with people? Do not misunderstand me now, and this is not intended to be irreverent, but most of us master fairly well the great matter of handling God -- we have fear of Him, we have respect for Him, we know how to say our prayers, we know that we ought to come to church, we know that we ought to think about Him every day. Maybe when it's all said and done, most people know what it is to be able to get along with God! By that I mean to recognize Him.

We can't say that you and I know what it is to get along with other people. This is where most of us have our difficulty. It may be because we can keep God at a safe distance -- but there are some people that we can't keep at a respectful distance. It may be that we have a way of ignoring God at certain times, that is, not thinking about Him always -- but there are certain people who apparently are always under our feet, no matter where we turn -- there they are....no matter where we may be, they have a way of creeping upon the horizon of our thought, and they're obnoxious, they're irritating, they're annoying. Every time we think of them they unsettle us, they unnerve us. There are some people, once they've seen a person, quite unexpectedly,

have their whole day ruined. That's the way they react to other people.

C But deep in every man's heart there's a dream, I suppose, of a hermit-like existence, if only to get away from other people, if only I can live my life according to my own plan and not become involved! Jean Paul Sarte says that when he thinks of Hell he defines it in terms of other people - - life for him would be like a paradise if it weren't for certain people with whom he had to associate, with whom he had to have relationship.

O But God made us as social creatures. You and I come into our fullest development only as we have the interplay of other people's lives upon ours. God never made any man to walk by himself. He made him to walk and to live with other people.

P But how, now, to get along with them? Religion does involve us, religion does say to us, you have no alternative, you have to live with people. This is one of the grand blessings that comes with the Incarnation. Our God is not removed from us. Our God knows the ways of this world. He sent His Son into the world. Jesus Christ came and identified Himself with man. He lived here. The name of the town was Nazareth in Galilee, and as a boy ... (picture Him, go ahead, you have a perfect right)...He ran up and down the streets of Nazareth, He heard what people said, inside their houses, back and forth, about one another.....He went with Mary, His mother, to the village well, and as He tugged at her skirt He heard the conversations that went on between women....

Y ...and when they talked, invariably they talked about people, and when they talked about people, they were always forming some kind of a judgment, because they always had their opinions, they were forever cataloging, and classify-

ing, and condemning....

As a lad He was in the carpenter shop -- the boy Jesus had ears -- the men came to the carpenter shop, and as they waited in the carpenter shop, as men will do, they talked. He heard what they had to say....

...how they talked about other people, and always when they talked about other people they had opinions, and when they had opinions they had judgments....and invariably they were condemning and judging....

When our Lord was here on earth He was exposed to this kind of thing.

And once when He preached what is now classified as that unforgettable sermon, the Sermon on the Mount, He dealt specifically with this whole matter of human relationships, using such words as these: "Don't judge people, don't condemn them -- forgive them -- be merciful to them as you want God to be merciful to you." So God in Christ says to us, "I know how this world can best run." You see, God made the world. As a manufacturer provides directions for any product, hopefully anticipating that the user will read carefully, that it might get the maximum benefit through operating efficiently, so God in Christ takes on this role -- so God in Christ tells us how we ought to live with one another, how this world was meant to run.....and because these matters of human relationships can be so vexing and so irritating and so annoying, He said, "Don't judge, and don't you condemn."

Would you believe me if I were to tell you that when our Blessed Lord began to speak like this, He wasn't echoing anything very new. Long before Jesus Christ the rabbis talked about this very thing, for man has always had the problem of how to get along with other people. He's never quite succeeded.

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That's why we have one riot after another, generation after generation; that's why we seem to have one war after another, one decade after another; that's why we have people severing their relationship, dissolving their partnership, either in business or in a home - - they've never quite mastered the art of knowing how to live, to co-exist, to get along with other people, to rise above a negative attitude.

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Long before Jesus Christ, there were rabbis who told their people there were certain things that would get a man favor in this world, and certain things that would merit him favor in the world to come. Long before Jesus Christ, there was a school of rabbis who said, there are six things that a man ought to master, and if he can master them, then he'll be recognized favorably in this world and in the world to come. Do you know what those six things are?

The first one is: He lives well who knows how to study

...God gave man a mind and a brain - - let

him apply it.

Y
Two: He will merit God's favor who knows what it is to visit the sick

....they are never meant to be ignored - - he is a

kind gracious soul who becomes considerate of others.

The third thing that merits a man favor in this world and in the world to come is if he practices hospitality.

The fourth thing: if he knows what it is to be devoted in prayer.

The fifth thing: if he can educate his children in the law

....and that is, of course, the Law of the Lord.

And then there is a sixth thing, spelled out carefully by the rabbis:

A man most certainly will merit favor in this world and in the

world to come if he knows what it is to think the best of other people.

C So you see, in a certain sense, Jesus wasn't telling them anything brand new when He was dealing with this part of the sermon, for man has always had this problem of knowing what it is to live with other people, and how to get along with them.

Now Jesus Christ comes along, and He says, you are to be merciful, as God is merciful, you are to forgive as God forgives. This is the positive.

O And the negative? "You are not to judge -- you are not to condemn." In essence, you are to treat people the way you want God to treat you. This is the way that you and I were meant to live with one another -- as you and I want God to deal with us, so, says God, you are in duty bound to live with other people. If you want God to be merciful to you, be merciful to other people. If you want God to not judge you, then don't you judge anybody else. If you don't want God to condemn you, to send you to Hell -- don't you treat other people as though you could send them to Hell.

Y Now you and I quickly say, "Jesus, we don't quite understand this..... judge not.....condemn not -- ".....but isn't this the kind of thing that we teach our children? Don't we parents feel as though we have succeeded fairly well if we've brought them to a place of maturity where they can make valued judgments? -- we know a measure of pride if they can size a person up, if they can evaluate a situation, because then we feel we can trust them in their own patterns of behavior, we know the kind of person with whom they will associate.....Jesus, would you mind explaining to us, then, when you say "do not judge and do not condemn"well, you and I know exactly what

Jesus means by this. He means that you and I are not to become so censorious that in our judging of other people we isolate ourselves from them, ignore them, and pretend they do not exist -- that you and I take to ourselves the role which God Himself reserves for Himself. Only God decides who goes to Hell -- He hasn't given that prerogative up. Now if this is what we mean by not judging and not condemning, can we look to better understand this rule of thumb which Christ lays down?

There may be three reasons, perhaps, why Jesus Christ says we are not to do the judging, we are not to do the condemning....

Reason number one: None of us ever knows the full story. Only God Himself knows everything about everyone. Some of us are not able to let everybody know everything that happens inside us. It isn't given to any man to be able to probe the heart and the mind and the soul of somebody else. You just can't do it, any more than you and I, perhaps, as individuals may ever be able to succeed at probing down deep inside the recesses of our own mind and heart. And then there are some things that we keep hidden deliberately -- we just never will tell. So you and I can't make a judgment on people, because it's not given to us to know the whole story.

Some of us don't know how disadvantaged other people may be. There are amazing numbers of people who have never had the benefit that you and I have had, and you and I don't know it by looking at them -- people who never knew what it was to grow up in a home where the father and the mother looked upon each other with respect and trust -- people who never had the advantage of growing up in a home where there was respect for God. There are any number of people who grow up where this type of thing is denied them, but you look at them, and you could never tell it. You may never know how disadvan-

tagged some people are, and therefore you are not qualified to make the judgment.

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You and I are not qualified to make the judgment because we may not know the whole story, we may not even know the whole person. You and I have a way of revealing only certain parts of ourselves to other people. We may be a Jekyll and we may be a Hyde, or we may even be a motley crowd that lives inside ourselves.....today I happen to be the gracious person that I am - - - given another situation, exposed to a different kind of set of circumstances, one's personality could change. And it may not be given to you to know the whole person. Only God knows the whole person. That's why God says, "Let me do the judging, let me do the condemning - you're not qualified to do it."

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And you know exactly what happens every time you and I presume to judge:we catalog, we classify, we isolate, we alienate, and we remove ourselves out of those people's lives. It's a terrible thing when barriers are erected because of our judgment against people with whom we have breakfast morning after morning, with whom perhaps we may share even the same bed at night. We are the image-makers - - - we get a concept, we get a notion, we put blinders on our eyes - - we see only what we want to see, we hear only what we want to hear, we think only what we want to think. You're not forgetting the title of the sermon are you? - - "A Sermon For Every One of Us".

We, then, who presume to judge are people also who are frail vessels of clay. None of us walks his way without a prejudiced eye. There is truth in that old nursery rhyme:

"I do not like you, Dr. Fell,
The reason why I cannot tell;
But this I know and know full well,
I do not like you, Dr. Fell."

There isn't a single one among us who doesn't understand that basic principle. Christ says -- "Don't judge! -- don't condemn!"

....because when you condemn and when you judge you alienate and you isolate, and you build a barrier between that person and yourself.

Every now and then when pastors go off to conventions they look forward to the time when they can steal out in the middle of the night, perhaps, or until the early hour of the morning, maybe until one o'clock....and sit around in a little cluster, and they lay bare their souls to one another, as well they should. I sat in such a group not too long ago. A pastor whom I highly regard, a pastor whom I would trust with my own soul anywhere, confided how, when he went to his present parish -- he's been there, now, longer than two decades -- there was a woman who came to him, after he had been there twenty years, and admitted that from the day that he came to that church she made up her mind she wasn't going to like him. For twenty years she bristled at the sight of him, her blood pressure went up at the thought of him....and for no understandable reason at all! Man of God that he is, he became aware of this and he prayed for her; and after twenty years she finally confessed and laid bare her soul. But think of the irreparable damage that was done through all of those twenty years, by a single person allowing herself to be alienated even from a man of God.

In a church that I could name some two hundred miles from here, there's a man sits on this side of the church, there's a man sits on that side of the church, Sunday after Sunday after Sunday. They never speak. They never greet each other. They deliberately ignore each other. They might just as well be

worlds apart. But the barrier is that great and that wide! Think of all the damage that's being done, when they permit themselves to exist like that.

God, who made the world, said it was made to run on love....

God, who made the world, said it was made to run on the best possible construction that can be placed on one another....

God, who made the world, echoed through His Son:

"Love one another - - love your neighbor as yourself!

- - don't judge him - - don't condemn him - - love him!"

And how do you love yourself? You love yourself in this way: you always give yourself the benefit of the doubt! You always see yourself in the best possible construction! You'll let me tell you, won't you - - it's a whimsical sort of thing.....but he's the grand old man, eighty-six year old Ellwood DeLong, who designed the Chapel of the Grateful Heart for us, presently being retained as a consultant for us as we finish our property improvement program. ...he wrote me a letter the other week, and in one of his philosophical paragraphs he says he always likes to hear good things about people, and this is why he never objects to a man talking about himself, because he's always certain that he's going to hear nothing but good things - - precisely so!

.....Jesus said: "Don't condemn - - don't judge - - love your neighbor as you love yourself!"

This is the way the world was meant to run. Maybe we'd better go back and read the instructions all over again.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"GOD'S KIND OF MAN"

The sermon, based upon the Epistle for the day, bears the title, "God's Kind of Man", and the text is the latter part of the 15th verse of the 3rd chapter of 1st Peter:

" -- and be ready always to give an
answer to every man that asketh you
a reason of the hope that is in you -- "

Those men of another day who made the selection of the passages of Scripture which will serve as the lessons for the day surely had their reasons for cutting off the Epistle lesson at the precise point at which they did. It's only a portion of the 15th verse.

But why, for the life of me, they did what they did, I can't quite understand. For it seems to me as I keep reading this passage that the Epistle lesson should have gone on marching to the very end of the 15th verse. For the latter part of that verse does belong.

Let me tell you why I say this. In this Epistle lesson for the day the great Apostle is spelling out for believers in the Lord Jesus Christ the kind of traits and characteristics which should become the Christian. The great Apostle honestly believed that when man should be a Christian he should be a particular kind of person, that specific traits and characteristics should become him. And in this Epistle lesson Peter tells us exactly what they are -- these virtues that ought to be characteristic of our lives. And then he goes on, in this 15th verse, supreme optimist that he is, taking for granted, you see, that you and I as a Christian become this kind of person, -- then he

says, "Get ready - "get ready for what?

"Get ready to answer the question that people are going
to put to you - - how do you become this kind of person?"

You see, Peter honestly believed that if a man emulated these things:

..oneness of mind and spirit....sympathy...brotherly
love....compassion....humility....forgiveness....

- - he would become God's kind of man - - and then people would take note of it! He would be so refreshingly different in a world of hate, in a world of strife, in a world of bitterness - - what a grand and good thing to come upon a person who would be gracious, sympathetic, forgiving....possessed by love. Bless his soul, he honestly believed that if a person would become like that, then other people would come to you and say, "How do you get that way? - - how can we become as you've become? - - tell us the secret."

Honestly now, Christians were meant to be different. There ought to be something about your life and my life, once we've claimed the name of Christ, that's completely different than anything we've had or knew before Christ came into our hearts. If there isn't a difference in your life, then Jesus Christ has no meaning. For Jesus Christ came into the world to spell that difference. Peter had a right to speak.

Peter, who denied, knew that there was a difference, and he wasn't going to be content until he kept telling everybody that he knew that they could be different, too - - gloriously different - - refreshingly different. So he writes the letter, and in this letter, a portion of which happens to serve as the Epistle lesson for the day, he says, "Now finally, all of you impress these

characteristics and embrace them and let these traits become you."

He named them. There are at least six of them. And once a man could be characterized by these traits, we have a right to call him God's kind of man.

Let me call one thing to your attention at the very beginning. When he begins to talk this way, he says, "Now finally, all of you - - " You get that, don't you? - - "Finally, all of you - - "

....you see, it's within the realm of possibility that every single one of us can become Christ-like. You're not fair, my friend, you're not fair with God and you're not fair with yourself if you permit yourself to think for any length of time that this thing of becoming Christ-like is something that's reserved for only a particular kind of person, a particular number of people, a highly selected group of people. The Apostle Peter says, "All of you pay attention to this - - I am going to talk about something that's within the realm of possibility of every single soul."

You see, it isn't right to think that God sits in Heaven pressing buttons and then, automatically, a halo drops down here, and a halo drops down there, just where you happen to be, and you happen to get the halo....that man three houses down the street - - he doesn't get one. It's not right to believe that you and I are just born automatically with wings that are going to flap, that automatically you and I take on angelic qualities, and some other people take on horns...tails...and come ready-made, equipped with pitch-forks! Says the Apostle Peter - - "Finally - - all of you - - - "it's within the realm of possibility for every single person to become Christ-like."

Then he goes on magnificently to name these things that become God's kind of man. Let us hear him out, shall we?

First of all, he says God's kind of man should possess a unity of spirithe should be possessed by a unity of spirit. This is one of the things that ought to become us.

...now, that doesn't mean that you have to have conformity to a thought process
...that doesn't mean that you have to become conformed to a particular pattern of behavior
...that doesn't mean that every single person has to be of the specific kind of personality that you might imagine

Any parent knows this, within the family circle there are these diverse traits of personality. Whenever you last talked to a parent who had more than one child, didn't you hear her say, "She's as different as day is from night from her sister!" - - - "We have two boys, of course, but they're so different!"and yet they have something in common - - they're possessed by a unity. They know it....a common set of parents, the bond of love makes them one.

We're not fair with our fellow Christians when we talk about the unity of spirit and then do not allow them to have particular traits and characteristics and personality. A great and eminent preacher once said that the glory of the Christian pulpit is this: that it is the communication of Truth through personality, and each preacher, with whatever gifts and skills that he may have, brings a certain something to this glorious Gospel that possesses him. So it is within our circle of Christian friends. We benefit by the variety of personalities - - but - - so long as we recognize complete oneness of mind and spirit.

Do you know, this is one of the grand things that characterizes this congregation. I say this to you, not out of pride but out of encouragement to keep it so. There are people who come to worship with us as strangers, and once they worship with us, they sense a oneness of the people who are gathered together. They can tell it, the way we pay rapt attention to the reading of God's Word, to the way we participate in the liturgy, to the way we wait, even now, as God's Word is being proclaimed. And there are those who come for the first time and discover in all that we're trying to do in God's name, how we are possessed by one mind and one spirit....and this is as it ought to be.

This is why, you know, in every group of new members that's received, the first thing that's always talked about is commitment to Jesus Christ and allowing that commitment to be expressed through their relationship with a congregation. These Confirmands who have been present at services today remember how, when they knelt at the altar in their moment before God, how the question was put: "Do you love the Lord Jesus- - ?"and then the question: "Do you promise to serve Him through His Holy Church?" - - - this should characterize all Christians - - oneness in their commitment to Christ which makes for a unity of the spirit.

I remember so well that first Sunday when I walked this sacred aisle, and all of a sudden you saw me as your Pastor for the first time - - I who had been elsewhere a shepherd of souls for a decade and one-half and more.....and then on that first Sunday together, we met. What was the comforting thing that kept echoing and re-echoing through my soul? - - I, who would be so eager to get to know you, yet I did not know your names, I did not know the paths that you had taken to come to this place, I did not know the paths that you would take once the service of worship was over, but with an eagerness to identify. What did you

do? -- as you looked upon this stranger in the chance: you said, he is committed to Christ.....and as I looked upon you and as I shook your hand inside the red doors when the service was over, I said to myself, even though you did not hear it, "Your name I do not know...where you've come from, I cannot tell...
...where you will go now and tomorrow, I do not know....but I know one thing -- you are a child of God -- you have professed faith in Jesus Christ as your Saviour -- " And from that moment on I allowed myself to believe that we are one. And this I would like to believe is true of all the rest of us as we gather for worship. We have this thing in common. Whatever else we may not know, says the Apostle Peter, this is a characteristic that should always become the Christian, committed to Jesus Christ -- the unity which is born of this commitment.

And then, says the Apostle Peter -- this should be characteristic of the Christian: he should be sympathetic, he should have a feeling that identifies itself with other people within the fellowship. One of the things that I desire for us as a people, that becomes increasingly difficult to know the larger we become, and that is that we get to know one another better. It would mean a great deal to any member of this congregation, that when the time of his burden becomes heavy, that a fellow believer in Jesus Christ should come to him, identify with him, sit with him, pray with him, weep with him, rejoice with him. It would mean a great deal to any member of this congregation that if for any of us there should come a time when we slip and stumble along life's way (I say this to you as I lay bare my soul) -- if any of you should ever find me stumbling in the pilgrimage of life, or perhaps choosing temporarily a detour, that another member of the Body of Christ should come to me, and sit with me, pray with me, turn my face anew in the right direction, suffer with me -- -- this ~~is~~ what

Christians were meant to do for one another. The word sympathy comes, you know, from the root that means "to enter into with a like feeling."

Then, says the Apostle Peter, this too becomes God's kind of man: if he practices brotherly love. Echoing and re-echoing down through the corridors of the Christian Church are the words of the Master, echoed by His disciples, "If we say we love God, whom we have not seen, how can we say we love God, if we do not love our brother, whom we have seen?" You can't quite improve upon Martin Luther's classic expression: "Hereby know we that the birth of Christ is made effective in us, if we take upon ourselves our brother's need."

My friend Oscar Carlson -- you know we were the team together in India -- has just retired from the active parish ministry. I had the good fortune to see him the day after formal services recognized his retirement. Among others I said, "Oscar, what's the pearl of wisdom for the day? Now that you've reached this point, what do you have to say?" He had a ready answer: "Don't run out of love! This is the thing the world needs most!" He said, "This is the thing that I need most. This is the thing that this church that I have been serving needs most. Don't run out of love!"

You know, that's the one thing that we keep saying to ourselves that God has plenty of. Therein lies your hope and mine, because in our need we know that we can come to Him and God never runs out of love. That's one of the golden cords in all of these three lessons read today. What a grand and good thing to remember that here, scattered all over the face of the earth, is a Christian here, and a Christian there, who is not going to run out of love, and the world shall be a better place because of it.

Then quickly-- the Apostle Peter adds, "This becomes God's kind of man: that he can practice compassion - look with pity and mercy upon somebody else -- not out of condescension.....when you can stand with a person on his level, shoulder to shoulder and heart to heart, and then pour out that unending amount of love which God is willing to channel through you.

Let me tell you this. Mary and Ted Bly gave me, not too long ago, a rather fascinating book, with a very interesting title, "The Gospel Blimp." It is the story about a group of men who got together after the war, well-intentioned men, from delightful suburbia, and they were having a cook-out.....and then someone posed the question: how would it be possible to spread the good news of Jesus Christ throughout all the world so that this world becomes the kind of place that God wants it to be? -- wouldn't it be wonderful if we could just make our dent and tell people? -- we are Christian, you know, they said.

Then someone came up with a very remarkable idea: "Why don't we buy a surplus dirigible, and we'll float this blimp, this dirigible, in the heavens above our city, and we'll get trailers behind it that quote verses of Scripture, and then we'll equip it with amplifying material, a speaker, recording device, and then, floating there from the heavens above there will come down to earth -- meditations....sermons....exhortations to living the Christian life, and we'll especially prepare religious tracts, and we'll scatter them from the heavens, and then they'll fall upon the earth and people will pick them up and they will read -- -- "

They got all excited. They organized. They had committee after committee. They purchased the blimp....they were known as the International Gospel Blimp Association. They were actively engaged in their procedure for a full year.

Oh, but I forgot to tell you, whenever they had their committee meetings, they looked at the fellow living next door. They saw him, you see, in his patio across the fence; and they kept saying to themselves, "We've got to reach him - - he's got to get the message, he's not one of our kind." And this made them all the more enthusiastic, you see, about what they were doing, because some day one of these tracts was going to fall on his back yard - - one of these days he was going to hear a preacher's voice from the heavens - - one of these days he'd look up and he'd see that verse of Scripture there behind the blimp. Meeting after meeting, they observed he went on just as he had been.

Except, after a year had passed, they had their annual meeting, their anniversary occasion. While they were in session somebody knocked at the door. And lo and behold, it was the man next door. They invited him in. Curious, they said, "You've come to us." "Tell me," said one man, "just what day was it that you looked up and saw the blimp?"

With a blank look on his face, he said, "Blimp? What blimp?"

Next question: "Tell us, what day was it and what was the number of the particular religious tract that fell from the heavens in your back yard, that you picked up and read?"

Equally blank, "Tract? What religious tract?"

This, of course, was more than they could take. So point-blank the question: "What brings you here?"

This is what he had to say, "My wife had been seriously ill. She had been in the hospital for quite a period of time. The lady who lives in this house, she heard about my wife's illness and she went to the hospital to visit...and then she made it her business to find out just when my wife was coming home....

"The lady who lived in this house came over to my house....she cleaned it all up....she prepared a meal....she brought food to the refrigerator...she got my daughter ready for my wife's homecoming. I've come over to thank her. And I want you to know that I'd like to become this kind of person." As simple as all this, my friend.....as simple as all this!

That's why the Apostle Peter says it becomes God's kind of man to be compassionate and practice brotherly love.

He also mentions two other things that time does not permit us to discuss. We could well preach a series of sermons on both of the remaining things - - humility and forgiveness.

Now let us go back to where we began.

Says the Apostle Peter:

"When a man becomes this kind of person,
watch out! People are going to ask
questions, and wonder how you get this way."

I close this sermon with a question:

Has anybody come to you and asked you lately
how they can become as loving, as forgiving
and as compassionate as you?

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"TILTED HALOS"

July 25 in the calendar of the Church is a saint's day. Today's sermon, bearing the title, "Tilted Halos" is based upon the Gospel for the day. The text is the 20th verse of the 20th chapter of Matthew:

"Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him."

Quite frankly, it's another of those passages in the Bible that sometimes you wish would not be there; and that if you had your way, perhaps with scissors in hand, you'd cut out certain things that you are sorry that you ever read.

It is a chapter, you see, that deals with two of the carefully chosen disciples, known also as members of the inner circle in the band of Jesus Christ. And when you consider them today, in this particular passage of Scripture, you find that their halos are tilted -- they are far from being firmly fixed....and their wings are not flapping generously and strongly, but they're somewhat clipped.

But one of the grand and good things about observing a saint's day is this: that it takes us back through the corridors of time and focuses our attention deliberately upon certain men, who, chosen by Jesus Christ, numbered by Him, were His followers -- and we see them exactly as they were. The Bible is not much given to glossing over the facts. The Bible deals with the real stuff of life. The disciples whom Jesus called were men who had feet of clay. This is what we are told about them.

You see, we're prone to forget that one of the amazing things about Jesus Christ is the fact that He never despaired of men. He was forever patient

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with them. He had to be because they brought to Him the real stuff out of which they were made. He simply had to deal with what they were, where they were, whenever He found them. To the everlasting credit of this precious Book that we cherish - - open it to any page, and you'll find life exactly as it was - - glorious on certain occasions....very, very disappointing at other times. The reason why we hesitate to come to this page and go back to it again is that you and I, generally speaking, much prefer to have our saints with their halos firmly fixed. A tilted halo, we say, doesn't much become a saint; wings that are decidedly clipped - - you see we want our saints fully equipped, and always radiant! This is one of our weaknesses. We're always willing to demand a little bit more from certain people who give us reason to believe that they are worthy of more than the average person.

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Today in the calendar of the Church it's Saint James, the Elder, the Apostle Day. From your Bible knowledge you remember exactly who he was - - one of the three. No matter where Jesus went, if He had any disciples with Him at all, you could always number Peter, James and John. They shared certain things that the other disciples never knew. They heard certain things that the disciples generally did not hear. This is the disciple, now, that the church asks us to focus our attention upon - - - James.

And when we come to the passage of Scripture that serves as the Gospel lesson for today, we find a passage that's far from being complimentary. Honestly, it's rather unsavory. Let me regretfully recall for you the incident.

Jesus had been to Bethany; and while He was at Bethany He performed that very, very wonderful miracle - - He brought a dead- man back to life. Do you think something like this could be kept quiet? The word spread everywhere - -

-- this is the kind of man this itinerant from Galilee is!

He can do these wonderful things!

...the word even got to one of the mothers of members of the disciple band, a woman who had two sons among the twelve. She must have thought to herself, "Now's the time -- I'll make my claim now."

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Salome, the mother of James and John, had ambitions. There are mothers like that, you know -- always pushing, always prodding, always desiring something better for their own children....."If something good is to be had in life, my son might just as well get it as somebody else." This is the kind of woman she was. So she permitted herself to think that one day -- "It won't be long now -- He'll be establishing His Kingdom here on earth, He'll be making appointments. A kingdom has to have a king. A king has to have someone at his right hand, a king has to have someone at his left hand. Why can't that be my two sons?"

So when she saw James and John she must have talked this plot over with them. And she said, "Now, as soon as I see Him -- I'll go with you, together we will approach Him -- you get down on your knees in front of Him, and I'll get down on my knees as well. We will worship Him. We will give Him the homage that belongs to a king. And then He'll have to pay attention to us. And then maybe He'll say, 'What do you want?' And then we'll name it."
.....this is precisely what happened.

They found Jesus. Salome came with James and John. But for some unexplainable reason, they hesitated. They were silent. The highly ambitious woman could not stand their silence, and so the mother speaks out, as much as to say to Jesus, "I've come to ask a favor." And He said, "What is it that you want?" And so she said it right out! -- "When you establish your kingdom,

how about my two sons, James and John? You can do it, Jesus, make the assignment right now -- let one of them be at your right hand, let the other be at your left."

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You'd have reacted exactly as the ten disciples reacted. They were indignant. How could they do this? -- how could they ride rough-shod over them? -- weren't they also to be considered? -- weren't they with Jesus from the very beginning?

.....I tell you, it's an ugly chapter in their lives. But there it is! The Bible doesn't gloss over the facts. It's made of real stuff of life, men who do have feet of clay, men who, once given a halo, can go around with it tilted, almost lose it.

The passage of Scripture remains where it is. You can't cut it out. And you can understand why. It does serve a purpose. It serves a purpose in your life and mine in this regard: when you and I look back over the days of our years, some of us can't remember when we were not Christian. We've always been followers of Jesus. When we recall the days of our years there are certain chapters -- figuratively speaking, we'd give our right hand if we could pretend that they'd never happened! But there they are, part of your life, part of your history -- the unpleasant, the ugly and the unsavory. And all the time you went around labeled a Christian. So we turn to the Bible -- and we get a measure of comfort, perhaps, in recognizing the truth, that the disciples were like that, too, -- they had their ugly chapters, they had their unfortunate moments, they had times when, would to God they could blot them forever from their memory!

The important thing in this Gospel lesson for today isn't that you and

I should be exposed to the washing of the disciples' dirty linen. That isn't the important thing. The important thing is that you and I should discover how Jesus reacts to disappointing disciples....the important thing is that you and I should discover how, by the grace of God, Jesus straightens out tilted halos, how Jesus Christ himself firmly fixes angels' wings upon us. So we turn to this passage of Scripture.

And now we turn from the saint to the Master, now we turn from the disappointing disciple to Jesus Christ himself. What does He do? This is the important thing....

...granted it was rank presumption on their part to think that Jesus could do anything like this -- admit if you will that it was gross selfishness on their part....
...what does He do?

He simply says, with the utmost of compassion as He desires to correct them, "You simply don't know what you're talking about." This is the kind of God you and I have -- as though, if you'll let me put it this way, God's always making excuses for us. God, who forever deals graciously with us, begins by saying, "You simply don't know what you're talking about."

You remember how that same thing is reflected down through the corridors of time....Jesus Christ hanging upon a cross, when man had done his worst, what does He say? -- "Let them be forgiven -- they simply don't know what they're doing."

Maybe it's because God can always take the long look. Maybe it is because God can see over and beyond our temporary moments of lack of faith and willfulness and selfishness. So that's the point at which He begins, "You don't know what you're talking about -- you can't possibly appreciate the import of what you're asking!"

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But they must be corrected. And how does He endeavor to correct them? He does it with the utmost of compassion, and He says, "Tell me now, while this isn't mine to give, are you able to drink of the cup that you're going to be given?" He replies to them by letting them understand fully that He can be never less than God, that He cannot be maneuvered, He cannot be bargained with. Selfish as they may be, He himself will not be selfish. So He says, "You just don't know. But I'll tell you one thing -- if anyone gets a place of preferment in the Kingdom, he's going to get it there because God himself has prepared it for that person who, if you please, becomes worthy of it."

...who could worship a God who simply answered the first
cry that came?

....who could worship a God who might say to this mother of
the two sons, "Very well, James and John, you have it!"
-- without rebuking them by saying, "It isn't mine to
give."

...how selfish they were.....how presumptuous they were.

You can't really understand what they were asking for until you look back and you remember that when James and John were asking for these places of preferment, they were edging all the other disciples aside -- and especially a man named Peter, who was numbered among their closest friends. No matter where they went with Jesus, Peter was there. This was the kind of thing they wanted God to do -- to overlook this fact -- to give them something at the expense of somebody else. And God refuses to be God on your standard, or on my standard.

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You're not forgetting, are you, what I told you, that one of the amazing things about Jesus Christ is this: He never despairs of men. He never says to any one of them, "As far as I'm concerned, you've had it." He is the personification of patience -- as though always willing to believe that "Tomorrow it's possible for you to be better than you were yesterday, and I know that you can become better." One of the things that you and I ought always to remember is that even though He knew exactly the kind of person that Judas Iscariot was, He never marked Judas Iscariot off the books! -- He never said to him, "I made a mistake....we will dissolve our relationship - you can no longer be my disciple." But He kept him even within the band of the circle until the very night when he did that terrible thing. You see, this is what you and I must remember when we come to this unsavory, this ugly, this unfortunate chapter in the life of two men -- whom Jesus had chosen -- and the only picture we get of them, men with tilted halos. But Jesus Christ, quietly and calmly and with the utmost of confidence, says, "Let me put your halo back where it belongs -- let me firmly fix your wings."

Every sermon, as you well know, is preached with a purpose in mind. Sometimes the preacher has to remind you what the purpose is. Will you permit me that privilege right now.

One of the purposes being served by this sermon is to remind you that every now and then you'll have your moments when you'll despair of yourself. Every now and then you'll have your moments when you will hate yourself for the kind of person you can be. That's right! -- and you are prone to despair. But Christians were never meant to be the condemned -- Christians were meant to be the redeemed. And let me remind you that Jesus Christ is the one who

comes to us and says,

"Your halo - - just a bit off-center. You have almost
lost it!"

...but He'll never say to you,

"You can't have it any longer. I'm going to take it
away from you."

This is the first purpose to be served by this sermon.

The second purpose is this, equally important if not more so: none of us as a Christian ever lives his life by himself. We are meant to live with one another. Christians are meant to walk with one another. And that means that every now and then you may discover that the person with whom you walk, the person with whom you work, maybe the person with whom you live - - even though bearing the name of Jesus Christ, is going around rather recklessly with a tilted halo. You may be prone to become very impatient. You may wish that you could wash them out of your hair. You may wish that you could have done with them whatsoever, in any way.

Let me remind you what Jesus Christ does. He says, if there's a correction that has to be made, then let the correction be made with compassion.... if the truth has to be spoken, let it be spoken with all honesty....if I have to deal with you with severity, then let that severity be characterized by kindness.

Beloved, that's the way you want God to deal with you. That's the way God wants you to deal with other people. Herein is their (right) ; herein, yours and mine as well.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Prayer - Pastor Shaheen
July 25, 1965

O GOD, in whose name we have been drawn together;

O GOD, Who is the Father of our Saviour, our Lord Jesus Christ,
hear our prayer ere we turn our backs upon this holy place.

WE PRAY, O GOD, that we may have been challenged by Thy grace and
by Thy Truth. We pray that in the time that we have spent here
we have been confronted by Thee, that we have seen Thee as Thou
art, a God who demands from us our best and in love offers us His
help, that we might become better than we are.

WE THANK THEE for the mark of Jesus Christ upon each of us. We
thank Thee, O God, for the prospect of Heaven, which in faith
belongs to us because of the redemptive act in Jesus Christ.

NOW, once we go from this place, let us walk in newness of strength,
with an avowed purpose to love Thee more daily.

But we cannot think of ourselves and only of ourselves. We would
pray for any who would be weaker than we, that perhaps they may
be made strong in Thy name through us; we pray for those who are
stronger than we, so that in our weakness we may be encouraged by
their example.

WE PRAY, O GOD, for all whom we love, wherever they may be, and what-
ever their need. Forgive each of us his sin. Set us on the pathway
of life as obedient servants, that unto Thee shall be all honor and
glory in a world without an ending.

OUR FATHER.....

"SAINTS, BEWARE!"

The sermon bearing the title, "Saints, Beware!" is based upon the Gospel for the day; it's the 9th verse of the 18th chapter of Luke:

"And he spake this parable unto certain
which trusted in themselves that they
were righteous, and despised others:"

Tell me now, what do you suppose is God's greater problem with us, trying to get bad people to become good, or trying to get good people to stay good? It could be that this Gospel lesson for today speaks to this very point. It's a story that Jesus once told to a group of people, to a particular group of people, with a particular point in mind. Whether it ever happened or not, I'm not quite sure....as to who they were and to where they were and when it happened - these facts we don't have. But there was a fundamental truth that Jesus wanted to establish in the minds of these people that prompted Him to tell this story.

It's one of the most interesting stories that He ever told. To begin with, it's the story of two men. Then, in addition to that, it's a character study, and as we observe each of these men we find something of ourselves in each of them. But don't forget, He told the story for a particular purpose. Let us look at it now, will you.

Let me remind you quickly of the important details. He said, "Once upon a time there were two men.".....

.....what kind of men? religious men.

...how do you know they were religious? because they wanted to pray - - they went up into the temple to pray.

....and while they were there, Jesus allows us a very important privilege: He

said, you can listen in while they pray.

Now, immediately I say to you, if you ever want to really know what a man is like, then close in on him while he prays. Tell me what a man talks about when he's in the presence of God, and I'll tell you the kind of man he actually is. So you see, this character study is a very valid one, because that's exactly what Jesus intends that we should learn -- what these men talked about when they prayed.

Oh, you're not forgetting, are you, that they're religious men -- you've got to give them credit for that. And each one of them wanted to exercise the noblest thing that God ever allows to any man....and the noblest thing that God ever allows to us is the privilege of being able to talk with Him. And that's essentially what prayer is.

So off they went to church. And while they were praying, you hear two entirely different kinds of thing. The one man tells God how good he is; the other man tells God how terrible he is. And each is talking about himself. And each is talking to the same God. And each is talking because, presumably, he is a religious man.

And after Jesus tells what each of them had to say, then Jesus does something that only Jesus can do -- He condemns one, and He sings the praise of the other....and when He did that, He gave us a parable with a surprise ending, for the people who heard Him tell this never expected it to end the way Jesus brought His story to a conclusion.

Let me tell you why. Well, let's look at this one man who is praying, who is telling God how good he is -- the man who was condemned by Jesus. And for the moment I make bold to do a very risky thing: in your presence I want to sing the praise of a man that Jesus condemned! It has to be done this way, else you

and I will miss the very significant point that's inherent in this parable.....
boldly I want to sing the praise of the man that Jesus condemned.

He was, Point 1, a religious man.

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Point 2: he was a so-called good man.....and whether you're willing to agree with what I'm going to say now or not, I'm constrained to say it -- a far better man, perhaps, than any of us! You can well afford to take a good long look at him. He was a Pharisee; he loved the Law of the Lord. He was schooled in it -- he knew his Bible inside and out. He knew all the precepts, all the teachings of the prophets. He knew everything that God exacted from a man. He was not a stranger to God, nor was he a stranger to God's purposes. He knew exactly what God expected from man, and diligently he endeavored to fulfill every one of God's requirements.....

...what any pastor, what any church council, what any congregation wouldn't give to have even so much as a sprinkling of his kind!

...he knew the calendar of the Church -- if there was a service to be held at such-and-such a time at such-and-such a place -- he was there! When the great Feast of the Atonement was held, he never missed! If he was told to fast, he went without food -- if he was told to fast once a week, he fasted twice a week! There was an ancient Jewish law that in the time of drought or famine, every devout Jew was to go without food at least twice a week, hopefully, you see, that what he did not eat would be enough to spread a table for somebody else. So he was mindful not only of God's requirement, but he was also mindful of the need of a brother. The Jewish law said that a man should give to the

Lord a tenth of the yield of his fields. What did this man do? --
-- "God, not only a tenth of my fields, but I give You a tenth of
everything that I have."

...I tell you, you don't get a man like that every day! Can you hear it again?
-- a man far better than any of us -- morally correct -- religiously circumspect.

Oh, but there's the other fellow, isn't there? There were two men.

Over in the other corner of the sacred precinct is a man upon his knees, presumably, or, if you please, prostrate in the presence of the Lord. What's he saying? He's a bad man, isn't he? He can't even so much as muster up to his credit one good thing that he can name before God!...and all that he does is: "God, be merciful to me, a sinner"....and hits his breast....

"God -- -- be merciful."

Now this is a surprising thing. In the telling of the story, Jesus says, "This is the man who gets the plaudit. This other man, this so-called good man, I am condemning." Tell me, what went wrong? Is there now, such a thing as the peril of goodness? Must there be a sermon such as this that bears the title, not "Sinners, Beware!" -- but "Saints, Beware!"? What went wrong?

Well, that's why Jesus told the story, and that's why, in truth, this sermon has to be preached. There is the prefatory statement. Always give due and proper heed to a preface, because in the reading of any book, if you give proper consideration to the preface you may get what the author has in mind! So the Gospel recorder very properly gives us the prefatory statement: "And He told this story -- but before you hear the story let me tell you why He told

it.....to certain who trusted in themselves, that they were righteous and despised others - - " Saints, beware! this is what went wrong with this man! He was so good that when he came into the presence of God all that he had to talk about was his goodness - - the Little Jack Horner sort of chap, you see - -

"What a fine fellow am I, God." - - pleased as punch with himself.

It is a grand and a good thing if a man can be that good, but then a stench begins to arise, when the only thing that a man talks about - yea, even in the presence of God, is his goodness.

The lamentable truth is that this man permitted himself to believe that he had 'arrived' - - that he 'had it made.' And this simply is not true. No man ever "has it made" as far as God is concerned, in the sense that he can allow himself to coast, in the sense that he can allow himself to believe that his halo is permanently straight, and his wings will flap incessantly. Kirkegaard was perfectly right when he reminds us that nothing could be quite as damnable, perhaps, as when a man goes on thinking in a flippant way that his salvation is assured. Every now and then our Blessed Lord told the story which was the parable of Judgment - - that not until men face their Maker would they know for certain that they had "made it" - - they had 'arrived'.

This is one thing that God simply doesn't allow us in this world, because as soon as any man presumes that he's arrived, he no longer knows what it is to fall upon his knees, but rather, he stands proudly, he struts into the very presence of God - - - "How good I am!" Saints, this is the peril of goodness! This is the temptation that comes to you, this is the temptation that comes to me - - that when a man starts talking about his virtue, he has a way of minimizing his sins. To the contrary, over in the corner is this man who could only say to God, "Be merciful - -

- - forgive me."

You may remember what I've told you before on occasion, how I chanced one time on a television drama. It came unheralded. I've never heard anything about it since. It had a fascinating title called "The Shadow of the Devil" - - the story of a woman who had a past...but then, by the grace of God, she was converted. Foolishly she thought that from this point on, the devil would always be kept at a safe distance. But it was not so....in fact, one of the telling lines in the drama was this: that the shadow of the devil was cast against her even to the very gate of Paradise....

...this was the mistake that the Pharisee made. Having made the mistake, he succumbed to the sin - - who knows, perhaps the worst sin of all! - - achievement - pride.

Coming down from the hills of home, I deliberately planned to stop in Gettysburg on Friday. They have a small summer school session at the Seminary, a crash course in Greek for students anticipating entrance into a theological seminary come September. They have chapel every day. On Friday they have a Communion service. Some 25 or 30 students, together with their professors, had the Communion service in the chancel. A number of things about it impressed me. It was quite different. They had a Communion table that they brought down away from the altar and put it in the middle of the chancel, and on it they had a bottle of wine and a loaf of homemade bread.

But these were not the things that impressed me most. What impressed me most was that someone had taken this ancient liturgy of our Church and tried to make it as contemporary as the present moment, in a very reverent way. Certain phrases were completely re-written, and there was a freshness about it. The one that I think I will remember most is this.....in the liturgy, you know, there is

the salutation where the officiating minister says to the congregation, "The Lord be with you." Now the response is already on your lips - you know it, of course - - "And with thy spirit." But whoever re-wrote that liturgy put it this way: "The Lord be with you" - - and the people respond to the preacher, "And with you also."

Now that's an excellent thing that they've done, you see - - as though they're reminding the preacher, "You need the Lord, too! Don't you stand up there, preacher-man, and look at us, as though you have arrived, we haven't!"an excellent thing to do.....

"The Lord be with you"

- - - "And with you also."

Now, there are those of us who love the Lord - - this is what we say about each other - of course we love the Lord! - of course we want to be numbered among the elect!.....be very careful now! - - watch it!down deep inside of you there could be this element of pride - -

....of all the places you could have gone

....of all the things you might have done right now

you're here

...."God, smile upon me - I deserve it."

....be careful. The world may shout back to you - - "Where is the Lord in your life?....and when are the moments when you humble yourself in His presence?"

You must remember, the only prayer that gains a man entrance inside the gate of Heaven is always this: "God, be merciful."

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"THE FIRST WORKMAN"

C It was amid the quiet of Pennsylvania hills that the sermon schedule for Saint Luke Church between now and next June was established. There, in the study, it was decided that the sermons to be preached in these ensuing weeks would be based upon the Gospel of John. Today is the first in that series, and the sermon bears the title, "The First Workman" and the text, the second and the third verses from the first chapter of John:

"The same was in the beginning with God.
All things were made by him; and without
him was not any thing made that was made."

O In all likelihood, you ask yourself at once, what is the writer of these words trying to say to us? -- "The same was in the beginning with God -- all things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was made" ...you have a right to ask this question, because these words were written by John, and John, perhaps, more so than any of the Gospel writers, if one dare put it this way, chose his words very, very carefully. He knew exactly what he wanted to say because he knew exactly why he wanted to say it. He was talking to a particular group of people. He wanted to give them a specific answer.

Y Now this is what had happened. When the Church was young, even at its very, very beginning, there were people who, wittingly or unwittingly, were doing something to the simple Gospel. They had taken this wonderful life of Jesus; they said, Yes, we believe He was born....yes, we know where He lived....yes, we remember what He said.....we remember what He did. But then they began to emphasize the intellectual approach to all of these things, and they tried to make it reasonable. They tried to intellectualize it all.

And when a man begins to do that, he's in for a certain amount of trouble, because you can never find God at the end of a reasonable statement -- that is, reasonable to you -- for the simple reason that you and I are limited by our own

minds. And maybe it's blasphemy of a sort to try to define God in the way that I can understand Him and say, "This is exactly the way God is."

This school of thought that endeavored to reduce God to formula, to a statement of reason, had the name Gnosticism. They said, "You can know it." Now this is all right to a point, but when they began working on this basis, they said, "If we're going to say God is pure spirit, then God can't have anything to do with this world, because this world is made of material things, and if God is going to touch this world, if God is going to become involved in this world, then this pure spirit, this pure idea, this pure mind which is God is going to become corrupt." Now it seemed as reasonable to them as all this.

So what did they do next? They said, "We'll have to figure a way out.".... and this is the way they figured it. They said God didn't have a thing to do with the world at the beginning....they said God Himself did not create it -- He couldn't afford to touch it. So, as they reasoned, they said God had certain agents, one after another, and God would work through them, and the one that was farthest away from God -- he became involved in the creation -- he was the agent that God used.

Now, as far as John was concerned, this was corrupt thinking, this was a way of belittling the very power of God! -- because John's God was big enough to be a Creator -- John's God was big enough to something like this -- the God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. And so as soon as John began to write his Gospel, he said, "This is the first picture that I want you to have of God -- He is creating the world....He's making something -- and Jesus Christ is also involved, because Jesus Christ is God. Jesus Christ is involved in this world, Jesus Christ has something to do with this world. You can't say He's detached

from it. Why, even when Jesus Christ came to the world, He was God in the flesh."

Now you see, this is why John says what he says: "In the beginning all things were made by Him, and there wasn't anything made that was made except by Him." Now that's the point at which we have to begin. And incidentally, this is your first Biblical glimpse of God, isn't it? This is the time when God is introduced to us through the pages of Scripture, either of the first chapter of Genesis or this first chapter of John. And what is this Biblical glimpse of God? It's God at work -- God doing something -- God creating a world.

We have to remember this, because we make a mistake, ever so often, when we limit God to holy places. It would be a lamentable thing if whenever you thought of God you thought of God only when you came to church. It would be a shameful thing if you had no thought of God except when candles were burning upon an altar. It would be a most unfortunate thing if you had always to be surrounded by stained glass windows before you would put your finger to your lips and say, "Hush"...and quiet your mind and say, "I walk upon holy ground."

We Christians sometimes fall into this error of believing that God must be associated only with so-called religious things, so-called religious places, so-called religious people. Do not misunderstand me -- as God would give me breath and energy I would always want to see this place of prayer a thing of beauty and a thing of dignity, that as soon as one would enter he would instinctively talk in hushed tones and know that his mind is being quieted. It is necessary, human as we are, to have certain places to which we may go where it is made easier to thing the thoughts of God. But God pity us if the only time you think of God is when you think of white robes and angels' wings, and the candle's flame, and

the chanting of an ancient liturgy.

Here the first Biblical glimpse of God is God-at-work. Let me be daring enough, let me be bold enough to do this for you, to say that when you get this first glimpse of God, His sleeves are rolled up, His muscles are being flexed, His hands are being put to work....He's busy....He's engaged in a creative task! Let me say it this way: He's doing a day's work! That's the way you read that first chapter of Genesis, that's the way you read the story of the Creation....

"And God did this on this day - - and God

did something else on another day - - "

...it becomes necessary that you and I become acquainted with these basic facts of God, that our first glimpse of Him is of someone doing something, creating something.....the First Workman.

Why do I make so much of this? Because it's possible for a man to reach a stage in life where he becomes melancholy and he's inclined to despair of this world, where he thinks it's rather a hopeless task to do anything about this world, where he no longer gets excited about seeing it improved - - where he no longer catches the meaning in a day's work honestly done.....where, perchance, he will permit himself to think that history simply repeats itself - it's a cycle, you see - - we begin, we work, we reach a plateau, and then we go all over again. There are those who maintain that there isn't anything quite as monotonous for some people as to go back to work tomorrow morning. Only few people might be able to answer as did a young man who said to me last night, when I asked him about his work - - "It's something new and exciting each day, each day is different." But for a number of people, all too many of them, the monotonous routine

of a day's job.

A day's work no longer has its halo. This is why I tell you, again and ever so often, get that glimpse of God at the very beginning....God at work.... God with His sleeves rolled up -- God doing something....

.....and God saying, once He had done what He did,

"It's good"

...and then this God giving this world into your hands and my hands, saying to us, "Now I charge you -- let your hands do something, let your work become productive, let your energies become sanctified." And this is what a Christian must always remember.

It's an unfortunate thing that there was a time in the history of the Church, there just before the Reformation, when the Church itself promulgated the idea that the work that was being done wasn't really sacred in God's sight unless a man went off to be a priest, a brother, a friar, a monk -- that a woman just couldn't be doing God's work unless she became a nun and served in the cloister. It's a sad day that this should ever have been allowed to be believed by Christians at any time. It's a better day that you and I have, because we talk about full-time Christian service, and not necessarily being a preacher, or a deaconess, or a parish worker, or a missionary. This is the day, you see, when the Church has put the halo upon any Christian doing any work that can honestly be done to the glory of God -- any kind of work that would make this world a better place in which to live.

Do I have to remind you, that while Jesus Christ was here on this earth for thirty-three years, it was only the latter part of His life, you see, it was only a time of three years when He went about preaching, corralling disciples, performing miracles. Was He, I ask you now, less the Son of God those

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other thirty years? Was He less the Son of God when He picked up the plane and the saw in the carpenter shop? Was He less the Son of God when He walked a way with Joseph and they delivered a yoke to the peasant farmer at the edge of the village? -- when they put the lintel into a man's house, was He less the Son of God? -- walking, perchance, ankle-deep in shavings....the halo was still His -- the hands of Jesus Christ put to work, to an honest day's labor.

We are indebted to our friend, Martin Luther, who spoke so perfectly and so properly when he said that even the shoe repairman who takes a child's pair of shoes, makes them tight and neat and sturdy, is in truth the answer to a mother's prayer that her child should know a measure of health -- even a pair of shoes properly repaired becomes a preventative against a cold or sickness. So Martin Luther says the shoe repairman who takes the pair of shoes and does a work honestly and well, to the glory of God, may perform a task as sacred in God's sight as the priest who stands with folded hands before an altar.

Now this, you see, is what we're trying to say. John says, Jesus Christ is involved in this world -- God made the world. The world is in our hands. Dare you believe that your day's work, no matter what it may be, can be done to the honor and glory of God? Dare you believe that your day's work, no matter what it may be, if done well, makes this, God's world, a better place because of your day's work? This is why this sermon is being preached today, the day before Labor Day itself.

I have reason to believe that when your last hour comes, and mine too, and we stand before the gate of Heaven, the Keeper of the Gate may not ask us alone,

... "How many times did you go to Communion?"

..."How many times did you read your Bible?"

..."How many times did you share a worship service?"

....important as all of these things are for the nurturing of the soul. But at that Great Gate there can also be the posing of this question:

"What on earth - - what on earth were you doing?"

Perhaps after it's all said and done, the only things that you and I really give to life itself are our time, and our energy, the efforts of our hands, the results of our thinking. God, who is the First Workman, the Great Beginner, whose creative stamp remains upon this world, will take us to task in this way. This I most certainly believe.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"A WINDOW IN TIME"

As announced last Sunday, the sermons for the most part to be preached between now and next June from the pulpit here in Saint Luke Church by your Pastor will be based upon passages of Scripture from the Gospel according to John. Today's sermon, bearing the title, "A Window in Time" has as its text John's very first verse:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word
was with God, and the Word was God."

We cannot underestimate the importance of the thing we have recently done in this service, when we have seen, even as it was true at 8:30, committed group of people stand in the shadow of an altar and promise to serve the Lord Jesus Christ through the ministry of teaching. What is a Sunday School teacher except he be a teller of the story of Jesus Christ? What is a Sunday School teacher except he be a communicator, one who makes known to somebody else what has been revealed to him?

Never underestimate the importance of using words. By words we know what other people think. There are some things that you know about people only because of what you heard them say. You have one impression, until they begin to speak. The little girl was nearer the truth, perhaps, than she thought, when she said, "How do I know what I think until I first say it?" There has always been the necessity to reduce or to project our thoughts into words.

Words are revealing. No matter what your age may be, if you're involved in the whole process of education, you know the high premium that's placed upon words. You may be a youngster going off to school, and you dread the thought of examination, because then, you see, you'll have to say it. You may be a candidate for your doctorate, and you know the importance of words, because the words that you use, either in a written or an oral examination, they will have some

indication of what you know.

Words are important. It is because somebody used words that I have a very definite image of Jesus Christ. It's because one day, even before I came to Saint Luke Church, I met with a handful of men who represented you, and by what I asked them and the way they answered, not only the tone in their voice but the words that they used, I had an impression of you. Never underestimate the importance of a word.

In the cause of Jesus Christ, words must be used. That's why I for one person have never taken lightly this terrific responsibility to stand here and for nineteen - twenty minutes to become involved in the use of words. How else can you be nurtured in the Way except there be a pastor who is a proclaimer? He may have said it facetiously, I doubt it however....some months ago I found him standing at that door when I was going to my office after the second morning service - - he was going to come to the third service of the day....and he looked at me and he said, "And what's the good word for the day, Pastor?"....and well he should have put the question that way - - the Word...."What is the communication that you're going to share with us - - ?"in the tradition of the prophets, "Thus says the Lord - - ". Ours is a God who speaks, ours is a God who reveals Himself.

These words, prefatory, are absolutely essential for an appreciation of the text which serves as a basis for today's sermon: "~~Intth~~ beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." So John begins his recital of the life of Jesus Christ. I gave two weeks of my summer vacation wrestling with the Gospel of John. I gained a new appreciation for it. Thwee was a certain period in my life when I didn't appreciate John's Gospel. Matthew rang a bell with me....Luke was far easier to understand. John might be called

the Beloved Disciple, but I wasn't sure that I loved his Gospel, particularly when I turned to its pages and I wanted to read about Jesus Christ. John says, this is the story of Jesus Christ -- "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God -- "and I reacted strangely.

....if you're going to tell me about Jesus -- talk about the star!

...if you're going to talk about Jesus, tell me about the shepherds!

...if you're going to begin the story of Jesus Christ, tell me about Mary, tell me about Joseph---tell me about the Child Jesus!

....this kind of thing would register with me.

And then I come along and I read John's Gospel. And John says, this is my record of Jesus Christ. And John starts off by saying, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

Well, don't sell John short. Of all the Gospel writers, perhaps none chose his words more carefully than John. John knew exactly what he was saying and why he wanted to say it and why he put it the way he put it. John wanted us to understand that Jesus Christ, above all else, is God's final, perfect and complete Word to us. Once we have seen Jesus Christ we will know all that there is about God! Maybe I ought to say Jesus is God's fullest, most complete revelation of God. And you never fully understand the life of Jesus until you see it this way. So that's why John begins his Gospel, referring to Jesus -- the Communicator, the Revealer, the One who tells the whole story of God.

Now bear with me, this is not easy, to understand or to preach it. Let us

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look at it this way. There are some people who unwittingly believe that it took Jesus Christ to make a Christian out of God! Now what does one mean by that? Until they read about Jesus Christ, they read the pages of the Old Testament; and when they read the pages of the Old Testament, ever so often they get a picture of a God who is demanding, who is austere, who is severe... ..who, if it is according to His will, can cause a whole nation to vanish from the face of the earth....who in wrath will almost deal with vengeance upon a people. This is the kind of picture that some people get of God as they read the pages of the Old Testament....an unbending, a severe, a very rigid God.

I'm far enough away from it now, and I can trust you with this when I say it.....one of the first things that I did in my first parish was, under the cover of darkness, to take a picture down from a Sunday School classroom wall, and to cart it off to the garage-like attic of the parsonage, and to store it there. In a children's classroom was a picture of a man, poised with a dagger in his hand, about to kill a child - - the sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham.....because, you see, if some youngster would have said to the Sunday School teacher, "Why is that man going to kill that baby?" the Sunday School teacher would have had to have said, "Because this is what God told him, to take Isaac along with him." Oh, as adults we can understand it's the testing of a man's faith, but many a child, you see, in his first impression of God through the pages of the Old Testament, cringes at the concept of a God revealed like that. And this is why it's very understandable, at least in the context of what I am saying, that a Sunday School child should react sometimes, and say, "Jesus I like, but God I don't like."

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What, now, do you do with something like that? What John is trying to tell us when he tells the story of Jesus Christ is this: God has never been less than God. All that God is He has always been, and always will be. This is a tremendous concept! But men with their limited understanding, you see, had talked about God in this way. But when Jesus came, and all the fullness of the God-head, He said, "If you want to know of God, what He is like, look at me."and that is not to mean that instantaneously, then, God becomes like Jesus; but rather this, God has always been as Jesus reveals Him to us.

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When I was a student in Seminary it was a very profitable thing for me to read the writings of a man who was pointing up what happened on Calvary; and what the writer had in mind was for us to understand that Calvary was not an isolated event in the life of God. It had its own distinctive character, don't misunderstand me, but in a certain sense the writer said what happened on Calvary has always been happening to God - - - since the dawn of time men have always rebelled against God.....since the very beginning of time man has always wanted to do it his way and rejected God, even God personified as Perfect Love. There's always been a broken-hearted God, if you please, a God whose heart has been broken by sinners. But at a precise moment in time, as a matter of historical record, Calvary did take place, even as the birth of Jesus Christ occurred.

Now, what does this mean to you and to me? It means that we have to be very, very careful when we become the image-makers and according to our limited understanding we're going to say God is like this. John says, (let me say it in a paraphrased fashion for you) - - "Don't you dare do that! - - as a person who takes the name of Jesus Christ, always think of God in terms of Jesus Christ.... ...always think in terms of Jesus Christ as God. Get the full picture." Paul,

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writing to the Colossians, said, "It pleased God to dwell in Jesus Christ with all the fullness that is God." Understand this very well, my friend -- God is severe. He hates sin. It's only because of the love of the sinner that He allows it to run its course. He despises sin. He can be very severe, He can be rigid, He can be very demanding. When you picture Jesus Christ as gentle, meek and mild, don't you do it at the expense of the full story -- Jesus Christ is also the same one who reached for a whip, and with sheer physical force drove men from the temple they were desecrating. We have not always been fair in our thinking of Jesus, we have not always been fair in our thinking of God. Says John, "This is what God is like -- He has always been like Jesus, and Jesus is like God."

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I suppose in my pastoral ministry the most difficult task that I have when I'm confronted by certain people is to convince them, if this is possible, that God is personal, that God is love -- that He's not an abstract idea, that He's not a philosophical notion....and also at the same time, when you talk about God being personal, to establish clearly in the minds of people that that doesn't allow a person to get away with something in the mind of God.

In the Old Testament, men with their limited understanding of God ran the risk of saying God belonged to them and only to them, and they always gave God, so it seemed, a Jewish face....and ultimately they ran into all kinds of trouble. When Jesus was here on earth He gave us to understand that other people were loved by God too, that there could be a place in the Kingdom for others. Don't you make light of that! Sometimes we run the same risk. We have a way of Americanizing our God, we have a way of putting Jesus Christ in our khaki, we have a way of making Jesus Christ look exactly the way we look. You see the

danger that you get if you don't understand the fullness of God, the perfect story of God, the complete story of God?

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The shock that some Christians get is when they're told that nowhere in the Bible does it say that God just loves Christians! The God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ gave His only begotten Son that "whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but shall have everlasting life." The most cherished verse in the entire Bible is given to us by John: "God so loved the world - - -"

To know God as Jesus reveals Him is to understand that when God hears our prayers....

....it may not be precisely as a Christian praying,

...or as an American praying,

..or as a white man praying,

..or as a Westerner praying

....to know what God is like, look at Jesus. He is the final, the perfect, the complete revelation. How, then, can you be anything less than loving and gracious, since you've gotten the Good Word?

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"REAL LIFE"

Today's sermon, bearing the title, "Real Life", is another in the series based upon passages from the Gospel according to John; and the text for this sermon is the 4th verse of the 1st chapter:

"In him was life; and the life was
the light of men."

It always seems to be the thing to do. You can recall any historical period.....

...a great man was born.....a great man lived....a great man died..

....and once he had run his course there were those who remembered how he had made his impact upon society. The very next thing that happens - - a budding young group of authors are constrained to write about him....

...."The Kennedy They Knew" - - "The Kennedy Years"

....perhaps a half dozen titles within a period of five years will become best sellers - - - always this desire, always this attempt to reduce to writing experiences, a record, an interpretation.

Would you believe me if I were to tell you that after Jesus had lived and then returned to Heaven, this thing naturally happened...the Gospel according to Matthew...Mark....Luke....John.....each in his own way an attempt to reduce to writing the life and times of Jesus Christ, or if you please as a title, "The Jesus That I Knew."

You must remember now, it's only a matter of legend, I cannot give it to you as an established fact, but there are those who tell us that certain people came to John, and they said to him after this fashion, "John, of all the disciples, you have the title 'beloved' - - we have to admit that maybe

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you were the nearest to Jesus. John, you ought to reduce to writing the Jesus that you knew, that all of us might benefit by seeing Jesus through your eyes." Those who tell us this legend said that John was intrigued by the thought - - he cherished it - - and he replied to his friends in this fashion: "I'll tell you what I'll do. If there are enough of you genuinely interested in this, then we will band together as a little company, we will be together for three days and three nights, we will fast and we will pray. And then if God should put it upon our hearts that this should be done, then even God will reveal it to me as to whether or not I ought to do it."

Well you know the result. Whether it came this way or not, at least we have John's Gospel...The writer of this fourth record of "The Life and Times of Jesus Christ"...."The Jesus That I Knew."

Now there is no other Gospel interpretation of the life of Christ quite like John's - - it stands in a class all by itself for a number of different reasons. Take this first chapter as an example. You remember the reference we made to it in last Sunday's sermon. Now take it as John gets only as far as the fourth verse, and there it seems as though the whole life of Jesus Christ parades back and forth of him - - those three absolutely, exi gloriously wonderful years. And John said one sentence about it, as he reverently remembers, "In him was life; and the life was the light of men."

....you notice that he does not say, "As I remember the life of Jesus, I want to tell you about all the things we dōd together.

.....I was there when He performed this miracle - I want to tell you how it happened - - "

...he doesn't say, "As I reverently remember, I want to tell you

how He preached the Sermon on the Mount, the way He held
people in the hollow of His hand, how He painted for them
unforgettable word pictures of God - - "

....he doesn't say, "I want to tell you about the time He
found me, and He pointed His finger at me, and He
said, 'God needs you' - - "

....it could have happened that way

" - - and then I decided to follow Him forever and ever and ever - - "

....he doesn't say, when he remembers Jesus, "I want to tell you
what a good mixer He was! Why you could expect Him to show
up almost anywhere! - - "

....he doesn't say, "I want to tell you about some of the exciting
things we did. Why there were certain times when we escaped
by the skin of our teeth! - - He was that controversial,
and He engendered hate on the part of some people! - - - "

John, who reverently remembers, may recall all of these things, but in one
grand sentence he says, "As I remember all of these things, in Him was
life, the life was the light of men".....as much as to say, "You want me to
talk about Jesus? I'll talk about Jesus, and when I do, I'll have to tell
you at the very beginning, I became alive in Jesus Christ. My relationship
with Him, and the relationship of others with Him, was a matter of life."

John goes on in his Gospel, you can read it for yourself. He highly
prizes that word "life" - - he's always talking about it. And then when he
couldn't express it in any better way, he says "It's eternal life" - - not
that he's talking about the length of our years. When John uses that descrip-
tive "eternal" he's talking about the quality of it, the kind of life that

bears the very impact of God Himself, the imprimatur of the divine that cannot be ~~xxx~~ erased. And John, in these early sentences in his fourth Gospel, says, "In him was life. I came alive in Jesus Christ - - ".....as though he were able to take the dividing line and say, "This is what my life was before Jesus - - - this is what my life was since Christ."

C Make no mistake about it, John was a good man! - - else Jesus Christ would never have put the finger on him. John, can you say that there was a time when a difference set in, an undeniable difference? That's exactly what he's saying when he says ± "in him was life" - - as though everything that occurred in his life before Christ was less than the real thing.

P As I live and walk among you and worship with you Sunday after Sunday, I am constrained to admit that you can't remember when you didn't know Jesus Christ. In one way or another you've always been His servant, you've always been His follower. But would you believe me when I try to put it this way: even though this may be true, there ought to be a sharp line of definition, a sharp line of division in your life, too, which is characterized by an awareness of what it means to be vitalized by Jesus Christ, to be made alive in God. Happy indeed is that person who can say that this is true. John reverently remembers.....for him Jesus Christ was not a memory - - He must never be a memory, for a memory is a thing that happened and is no longer...but as Jesus was reverently remembered by John, there was this continuing awareness of His nearness, His presence, the undeniable Fact.

Y I began my ministry in the war years. One of the first marriages I performed was for a handsome, gallant young man, and a very precious, adorable girl. Not long after they were married the call came, and overseas he went. Then we got the report: missing. A few weeks later: prisoner. Then we didn't

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hear. One of the men I wanted most to see 'When Johnny Came Marching Home' was this chap. Somehow I believed he just had to come back. And he did. Without vanity I tell you, one of the men he wanted most to see when he came back - - the Pastor who married him, the man who remembered him daily in his prayers. We had our little session in that parsonage in South Williamsport. He laid bare his soul...then unashamedly the tears came down his cheeks and he said, "I shall always remember that particular moment when we knew that we were being released, when we knew that our American forces had arrived, when I no longer would be a prisoner.....then that very, very special moment when Old Glory went up the standard. Then I knew what it was to be an American, as I had not felt it before."

.....his reaction toward his country - - not that it was not a valid thing before.....but you see, he had had his skirt with death, he had had his day in the camp of the enemy, then this thing did happen, and he knew what it was to be snatched away from the enemy, to be made free!

Spiritually speaking, I say to you, this ought to be the recital of your experience, too. You'll understand how I'll say it, and I would recommend to any man an encounter with the Devil.....so great is my faith in Jesus Christ that I would hazard for you a day and a night in the camp of the enemy, if only that you might know the thrill and the glory and the joy of being redeemed, of being rescued, of being made free from the clutch of the Devil. Then you might know what it is to be made alive in Jesus Christ!

.....then you might be able to say,

"Come alive - - we're in the Jesus generation."

That's what happened to John. That's what happened to certain other peo-

ple that he wrote about - - - there was a difference, and the difference was a matter of life - - - real life. Anything before Christ was less than the real thing.

C I have lived long enough to be annoyed and irritated by people who settle too easily for the artificial, for people permit themselves to think that if they can taste life in the raw, they've found the real thing. That's why I tell you from this sacred desk even now, that occasionally I deliberately go to a news-stand, and then I stand there and I look, and I read the titlesof all the filth and the trash that's in print, with the exciting and the presumably stimulating covers. There are people who say, "This is life."

O And deliberately, not that I enjoy this as steady fare, I read the pages, the announcements of Hollywood's next productions....what's going to be paraded from the screens....then I read all of the advertising material, the promotional gimmicks, as though you haven't lived, you see, until you've had that experience, as though you haven't lived until you've become that kind of person. And they say it's the real thing.

Y This is one reason why on occasion I go to the barber shop not wearing a clerical collar - - I can learn so much of what some people think is the real thing. In the periodical that I get from England I read a preacher's comment the other day that what he considers one of the fringe benefits of the ministry was that as a clergyman he didn't have to spend a great deal of his time listening to off-color stories.....the kind of thing that some people believe is the real thing.

John said, "When I remember Jesus Christ - "

.....against the nauseating background of his day, he said,

"Jesus Christ, in him was life - - this for us was the real thing."

I have been with you long enough that you have discovered the passion that I have for young people...In my desire in your behalf to see them grow up in the nurture and the admonition of the Lord. That's why every single staff member we've ever called to Saint Luke Church has been given a significant measure of responsibility for some phase of youth work. It's no secret, you're entitled to know it. Every now and then we lose a young person in Saint Luke Church to our program...doesn't come to Scouts, doesn't come to Sunday School, no longer sings in the choir, won't come to BIG THURSDAY or Luther League. The feedback that I get is something like this: "They're a bunch of squares down there - - " (I think I understand the jargon, you see the jargon changes every five years - it takes a bit of doing to keep up with it).....but my heart goes out to a youngster like that, who is foolish enough to believe that with the gang that he now associates with he's found the real thing.

I suppose I could say to myself I have reached the age where I don't have to do it, but with a measure of enthusiasm I hie my way to a mountain, during my vacation period, to be with thirteen adults, who in a solid week invested their lives in fifty-four teenagers. And as our Director of Youth Work spelled it out to the staff, the meaning of all of it was that together we might impress upon them the fact of Jesus Christ, and that in Jesus Christ is the real thing.

Will you understand when I put it this way. Some day my work among you will be over, the pastorate will have been concluded. I, too, should like to be reverently remembered, reverently remembered in this way: he preached

helpful sermons, he delighted in seeing that the Choirmaster and Organist established for us a standard of excellence; he knew a measure of satisfaction in seeing the Christian education program expand, the best possible materials used, the best leadership possible given to the youth program...he was a nice person, congenial, amiable, mixed freely with all of us...

.....maybe I should like to be remembered that way....I'm not so sure.

But I'll tell you what in the sight of God I would cherish most - - if when our days together should have run their course, any one among you might have said, could have said:

- - he helped make Jesus Christ real to us. He caused us to become dissatisfied with anything that was less than the real.

For in the final analysis, only two divisions remain, the real and the artificial. And you talk this way whether you're walking through a department store or whether you are talking about people. There's always the tendency to prefer the artificial. The real may exact a higher price, a greater measure of discipline. But in the end, it's only the real that lasts.

John, tell us about Jesus Christ.

John reverently remembered. He said, "In him was life."

I have my prize moments as your Pastor. Every now and then I see it happening among you. I spent a good portion of Friday with a teenager who gave his summer to go to Puerto Rico to invest his life in miserable humanity - - - the real thing.....

....the Chapel of the Grateful Heart in Saint Luke Church becomes a

lasting testimony of a member who came and said, "It was through Saint Luke Church that Jesus Christ became alive to me over and over again."

....it was a man in his eighties who came and said, "Jesus has saved me!"

Because these things are true, some of us can honestly believe that we have come alive - - - we're in the Jesus generation!

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"THE LIGHT OF MEN"

The sermon for the day, bearing the title "The Light of Men," is another from the pages from the Gospel according to John. Today's text is the same as last Sunday's text, it's the 4th verse of the 1st chapter:

"In him was life; and the life was
the light of men."

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When a speaker or a writer makes frequent use of the same word, it doesn't necessarily follow that he's thoughtlessly repeating himself. It could well be that in his judgment he has yet to find a better word, and so he goes on using the word that he's already chosen, for it's the best way of expressing the thought that has claimed him.

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When you read the Gospel according to John, you find that he repeats himself ever so often, using such words as life and light. He is the one, you see, who makes Jesus Christ say, "I am the light of the world." He is the one who has John the Baptist, as the fore-runner, saying, "I am not that light - - I am simply the one who bears witness to Him who is that light." It's in the Gospel according to John, you see, that a reference is made to us, that we should walk as the children of light and not of the darkness. It's John who had Jesus Christ saying, "I am the light of the world. He that followeth after me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

It was given to John, of all the Gospel writers, to reverently remember Jesus Christ in a way that the others could not remember Him, for John of all of them, you see, was the mystic, he was the poet, he had insight, he had perception, that the more prosaic of them did not have. He is the one,

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child successfully makes the transition from the light in the room into the darkness. There are those who, when they face their last hour on this earth, are afraid that they might go out into the blackness of a night, and that's why they cling tenaciously, if they're fortunate enough to be the child of faith, to the precious promises of Jesus Christ, to one who said, "I am the way, the truth and the life.".....the one who says, "I am the light of the world. He who follows after me shall not walk in darkness, but shall walk in the light of life."

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When our Blessed Lord was here on earth John says "He was / a light given." That's exactly what He was! John, presumably, was talking out of experience. Human as he was, he knew what it was to have the dark recesses in his own soul. Human as he was, he knew what it was to be a child of prejudice....and what is prejudice but blindness, drab darkness, a kind of darkness that we choose for ourselves. It's always a startling thing to discover how secure people become, if only they can be possessed by prejudice - - unwillingly would they be told the truth. They know a kind of security in their position of hating and despising, the kind of security in drawing a circle, you see, beyond which they will not go, and inside which they will not tolerate those whom they despise. When our Blessed Lord was here on earth He was always confronting men who went about content in their prejudice; and then when He entered their lives with the light of Truth - - (and interestingly enough, isn't it, the symbol for truth is always a lamp).....once they were given this light, then the scales fell from their eyes.

I have not sat with the committee that's planning for the forum tonight.

C I have met with them in committee on occasion; but they have my unqualified support, if in their attempt to present certain things for us tonight, they will lead us in the way of truth. When our Blessed Lord was here on earth He was confronted by men who lived in the darkness of ignorance. They really didn't know themselves. They really didn't know the people with whom they lived. More than once a person has confided to a pastor, "I am in the dark as far as he's concerned, Pastor. I just don't know what makes him tick. I can't quite understand what motivates him." We do live and move in a realm of darkness in our relationships and with our understanding of other people.

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P Until Jesus Christ came, men had a shadow around the face of God. They were absolutely ignorant of all that He is, until one day that well-meaning disciple came and said to Jesus, "Tell us what God is like, and it will be enough for us"and then He stood there and quietly and confidently and with the utmost of assurance said, "Look at Me. Whoever has seen Me has seen what God is like!"

Y If it were my responsibility to paint the picture of contemporary man, I think I'd paint him as one who is groping in the darkness, in a world of confusion - - a man who is trying to find his way. This is one reason why I keep feeling the claim of God upon my soul, because I find myself thrust among you, as one whose task it is to try to introduce people to Jesus Christ. And with all my heart and soul I believe that until a man comes to know Jesus Christ as He is, he's less than a man, less than the man that God ever intended him to be. That's why I turn ever so often to that motto which has become the motto of my life, that hangs on my wall here at the office - - "So naturally we proclaim Christ - - so naturally we teach Christ,

presumably, who was so close to Jesus that he was called the 'beloved disciple'. He is the one, you see, who is pictured on the night of the betrayal as leaning upon the shoulder of Jesus Christ. He is the one to whom Jesus said, amidst the agony of the crucifixion, "John, take her home with you - be to Mary as a son and let her be to you as a mother." That's how close he was to Jesus Christ.

And when he reverently remembers what Jesus was like and what He did, and what He was, John has to talk the way he does. That's why, as we considered last Sunday, it was John who says, "Why, He's life - - with Jesus I became alive".....and now in the very same text he says, "and in that life was the light of men..... "

"you want me to talk about Jesus Christ?" says John,

- - "I'll talk about Jesus Christ....and when I talk to you about Jesus Christ I want you to know that I am talking about someone who is the difference between life and death - - someone who is the difference between night and day...

....when I talk to you about Jesus Christ, I want to talk to you about life, I want to talk to you about light."

Tell me, my friend, do you know what is the oldest of all the fears of men? We've been given to understand that perhaps the oldest of all the fears that we've ever had is the fear of darkness. We shy away from it. Any mother understands this so well. That's why when she tucks her infant into his crib at night, she stays by the crib, assuringly so, until the

- - we tell anyone we can, everyone we can, all that we know about Him - - "
....if in the telling, you see, we might be able to life a man up to his full maturity in Jesus Christ. John says, "That's the way I found Jesus - - I found Him to be all this - - the life-saver and the light-giver. He shed light upon my soul, He shed light upon my world, He shed light upon the face of God."

We may be afraid of the dark. Not everybody can be as fortunate as Robert Holm's uncle who wrote a fascinating treatise on "The Friendly Dark". It's the finest thing of its kind I think I have ever read. He tells about a man who every now and then would go out in the darkness of night - - he'd wait for the night to come - - he'd sit on a rail fence, and then he'd wait to see the creatures of the night come out, the animals that would be on the prowl, that otherwise he might never see....he'd wait there in the darkness for the sounds of the night, that otherwise he might not hear.

It's only a rare soul like that, you see, who can be unafraid of the dark. Most of us are afraid of the night, and the dark. The "dark night of the soul" is the way we put it. And why not? Because whenever you think of sin, you think of the blackness, the despair, melancholy. Jesus the Saviour brings light.

Now let us look at it this way. Since He is the light-giver, what does that light do for us. Let me suggest that you begin by recognizing that Jesus, who is the Light of the world, sheds light upon God's purpose in your life. Part of the job of a pastor is to keep putting God in the vocabulary of people. Part of the holy responsibility that rests upon a pastor is to bring God into people's thoughts, to make them realize that until they see God's purpose in their life, they will fail, and they will grope and grovel.

If I did not believe this I would demit the ministry tomorrow...If I did not believe this, I would not want to come again to the sacred desk. This is a great responsibility, and it's a far more difficult task than you may be willing to admit.

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Do you want to come with me now, into the counselling room and into the conference session. We're talking back and forth. It's a couple that's laying bare their souls to their pastor. They've come upon a hard and difficult time. Earnestly I believe that their only hope is until they begin to see the light of God's purpose. Each one, you see, wants to do it his way, each one wants to keep securely in his own mind his picture of the other person. I recall one time when I shocked a person almost off the edge of her seat, when for twenty minutes she seemed to talk incessantly, with all the venom in her soul being spilled out against this man...

....and then I said to her, "Do you realize that you've been telling me about this man for twenty minutes, and you haven't said one good thing about him....and you haven't indicated any willingness on your part to believe that one good thing could be said about him!"

....so fixed do we become, you see, in our way of sizing a person up, in our way of analyzing a situation.....and the most pathetic of all things, in our way of resolving it! Jesus Christ said, "I am the light of the world - see it my way - - see it according to God's purpose." This is what Jesus will do for a man.

When Jesus Christ sheds this light, let me tell you how He sheds that light. He sheds it in two different ways, and don't ever hesitate to thank Him for it. In the first place, He sheds that light on the distant goal.

C What is your ultimate objective in life? In the liturgy of the Lutheran Church we keep spelling it out for you, Sunday after Sunday after Sunday...
...."unto everlasting life" - - what is your destination? Heaven is the destination for the Christian. This is my aim. When Jesus came into the world He made people Heaven conscious. When Jesus came into men's lives He put before them the ultimate objective - - "This is the end toward which a man should live." He is not meant to be earth-bound creature. Jesus, who is the Light of the world, focuses upon Heaven's gate.

O And at the same time that He becomes the Light of the world He focuses upon the immediate day, the immediate situation. The light works both ways, the long range and at short range. You may think of it, if you please, like the disc that's fastened around the brow of the physician, who wants to focus directly upon a tiny spot in your throat. That's the thing that concerns him most. His ultimate aim is your well-being, to restore you to health, and as he works toward that end he focuses upon that source of irritation. It's like the light, you see, on the miner's cap. His ultimate objective is to see that you get coal, or fuel, but for the immediate moment his job is to do the task at hand.

Y We have to remember this, my friend. It's never enough to say that you are Heaven bound. The problem that vexes most of us is this: how can I act like an angel right now? He who arrives at Heaven ultimately must be in Heaven now.....and it's Jesus Christ who sheds light on the demands and the needs of the immediate moment. If He cannot be as practical a guide as that, then you are following only a fantasy and only a dream.

One of the most rewarding things in life is to be able to be used by God

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as a kind of reflector. Let me end this sermon by the part of the sermon that you read before you came to church. They were a little colony of South Sea islanders who never knew what a Christian was like, until one day one came to live among them. After he died one of the natives paid him the perfect tribute - - "Before he came to us" he said, "there was no light; after he went away, there was no darkness." He could not have said it better. This is what a Christian is - - meant not only to walk in the light, but to spread the light.

There are some people that I shy away from....when I'm near them they bring darkness into my soul...

There are some precious souls of God toward whom I want naturally to gravitate, for when I'm in their presence, even the face of God lights up.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"AND THE DARKNESS"

Today's sermon, bearing the title, "And The Darkness," is another in the series based upon the passages of the Gospel of John; and the text is the 5th verse of the 1st chapter:

"And the light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness cannot put it out."

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If we can permit ourselves the luxury of believing the legend, that a group of Christians came to John and said, "You were in the special group, you were part of the inner circle - - we think you ought to put down an interpretation of the life of Jesus Christ - - there ought to be a Gospel according to John"....now we can give credence at once to their request, if for this reason, you see, and this reason alone - - he was the disciple who was referred to as the Beloved Disciple, he is the man who was privileged to lean upon the shoulder of Jesus on the very night when He was betrayed... ..he is the one to whom the other disciples turned when they wanted to put a question to Jesus, a very specific question that night. John is the one who stood at the foot of the Cross, and to whom Jesus said, "Take Mary home with you, John, let her be to you as a mother - - you be to her as a son."

....it's a natural thing, then, that they might come to John and say, "We want to see Jesus through your eyes".....it's only a legend, but there's something in it that you and I can well afford to recognize.

And if we're going to accept it, at least for a brief moment, let's take one step more and try to picture, then, this early group of Christians coming back to John and saying, "We'd like to see your first draft, John. What have you to say about Jesus? Let's see the opening paragraph." And then maybe

they constituted a kind of group of editors, about to pass judgment, to criticize, to question, to offer a suggestion, on the very thing that they had asked John to do.

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And if one can afford this line of thought, then they came to this particular sentence, "And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness cannot put it out" - - - in all likelihood somebody said, "John, you got the verb in the wrong tense, didn't you, John? You really want to say 'the light shone in the darkness' - - if I read it correctly, you're saying the light shines - - that's present tense, John, you want the past tense, don't you?" ...John evidently stood his grounds, because that's the way the translation is to this very day. It's in the present tense.

And that's exactly the way John wanted it to be. John is the disciple who reverently remembers Jesus, there's no question about it. But when he remembers Jesus, he can't deal with Him as a memory. He can't simply think in terms of Jesus as the Man-Who-Was. So great was the impact, so vital is this Jesus Christ, that He's alive - - He must always be thought of in the present tense. So John says, "I am referring to Jesus, I am calling Him the Light of the world, and I'm telling you that that light shines, right now."

This is something that we Christians must never, never forget. We succumb all too easily to being possessed by a backward look when we think of Jesus Christ, we're always going back two thousand years, we're always looking back to Bethlehem, we're always looking back to what happened on Calvary's hill. Now there's much to be said for the dynamic that comes with the memory of a grand and a good thing, there's no question about that....but you have to be very careful lest you go through life forever looking backward, and not being made aware of all that's happening right now. Where did I read it, that

the people who suddenly discovered that this planet of ours is a star in itself, and they were always looking out, we earth-bound creatures, to the stars over and above and around us -- perfectly oblivious for the time being that every one of us, in truth, is already standing upon a star!

...John says, "The Light is shining - - now."

Well, they tried another word out for size, this would-be group of editors, this would-be group of critics: "John, do you have to talk about the darkness? - - 'and the light shines in the darkness' - - we feel this just as keenly as you do, John - - we know exactly what you mean when you talk about the darkness. To this very day we can sense the hostility that confronted Jesus Christ, to this very day we can picture and identify ourselves with what happened on Calvary's cruel hill....we can see the blood, we can smell it, on that place of crucifixion, you see, stained by the blood of so many....and that's where they put our Lord, and that's where they put our Master - that's where they put your friend.....we can hear the cries and the shouts and the ridicule of the scribes and the Pharisees...we know what you mean by the darkness, John, but it's all over now! He's the Lord of death. Life is greater than death, we know this. Let's not talk about it any more."

...John stood his ground. The translation remains: "and the light shines in the darkness and the darkness could not put it out."

As far as John was concerned, he could not think of Jesus Christ without realizing that light has no meaning unless it does something to the darkness, unless it provides a ministry in the darkness. You really can't talk about the light without the darkness. So John keeps it there.

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When John was talking about the darkness he was really talking about the darkness which is evil, and from the very beginning the shadow of the dark was cast upon the Babe in Bethlehem, and the shadow of Evil followed Him all the days of His years. Now if you and I can well afford to believe, and rightly so, that the fact of God is meant to be an ever-present experience, that this Light is now shining, then we must also recognize the somber truth that the darkness surrounds us, that Evil is about us. Evil, too, is ever-present. The ancients in the East Believed that there were two parallel forces in the world, the force of evil and the force of good. In the Far East, they called it Light and Dark. That school of thought maintained they were of equal value, and they continued to exist side by side. A Christian can never subscribe to that. He may recognize the force of evil, he may recognize the force of good, but he can never reach the place where he can say that they are equal. The second most powerful force in the world is evil. It's always surpassed by good.

You and I may forget this at times. We look out, round about a world, and we see the darkness, or, as an ancient philosopher from China, wasn't it, when he was talking about the invincible world of goodness, he said, "It's like the water that you cannot see, but it flows silently amid the rushes, and you can only tell where it is because of the green that you see, but it's there!"

If I were to take my teachers to task, especially in the days of impressionable youth, the days so precious to those who on my side here, I think I'd take them to task for not making plain enough to me that I will always have to do battle against the Evil One. It's one thing to talk about the love of God,

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but a Christian can also talk about the evil in the world. And maybe this is the undoing of our generation: we're not about to say anything unkind about anybody. Maybe the curse of our generation will lie in the fact that we don't even recognize evil when we see it. Maybe our undoing could lie in the thought that evil is a word that's becoming lost to our vocabulary. There was a time, they tell me, in a generation or so ago, when a mother would say to her child, "That's a wicked thing! -- It's evil to think that!" Now we talk about "It's not nice....it's not pleasant."

Who among us perhaps, if we permit ourselves to be sensitive, cannot understand the plight of the noble Englishman who said at the outbreak of World War I, as he stood there by the English Channel and figuratively surveyed the continent, and saw the lights going out in one embassy after another, he said, "The lights of Europe are going out one by one, and I do not think that I shall see them go on again in my generation."

The Christian may look out about the world, and he may say to himself, "The lights are going out one by one"...but he can never say that there will be total darkness, for with God there is no such thing as total darkness. You know why I can say that? -- because of you! One day He who is the Light of the world said to people just like you and me, He said, "Ye are the light of the world. Let your light so shine, that men may see your good works and glorify their Father which is in Heaven."

Little heralded, but one of the grandest things to come out of World War II is the fact that in France there were certain very devout and committed priests, who went into the munitions factories in Germany to work among the French who had been taken prisoners of war....and they said, "We will not go as priests, we will go as fellow-workmen -- we shall identify with

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them, and then when any man asks me for a favor," said the worker-priest, "I will do what I can to help him." And whoever was in charge of the worker-priests said, "Stay with a man long enough, and within ten minutes he'll be talking to you about God." Now the man in charge of the worker-priests could say that because of the kind of priest he had sent to Germany. They were the completely committed, they were the truly sensitive ones, they were the reflectors of God's Grace and God's Truth.

Along the waterways of the world, where there are reefs and there are rocks, there are warning lights, and the mariner comes and he reads his signal according to the blinking of the lights, and then he charts his course accordingly. But the lights have to be burning if they are to be of any value.

God knows the precarious way that you and I must take through life. And God, against the darkness of an evil world, has raised His lights, He has raised His lamps, and they're burning....

...there's the light of His Truth as you find it in the Scriptures - - "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet"

...He gives us Jesus Christ who himself said, "I am the Light of the world. He that follows after me shall not walk in darkness."

...He set you and me down, here and there, to be as candles, a light, and a glow....

Some of us have lived long enough to know that if it had not been for certain people, we would have been lost in the darkness, but the basic integrity and character of their lives began to shine, and then we found our way.

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All the darkness in the world cannot put out the most insignificant candle, as long as it burns.....it may flicker, it may sputter. You and I are feeble -- there's no question about it, but God himself knows how important may be the flame of your life. The darkness is great, but I don't think our Lord and Saviour has changed His mind a bit. He would say to us what He said to a group of people on the Palestinian mountainside - - - honestly - - - take my word for it!

"You are the light of the world"

....He could say that to people that He
could trust.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

" A MAN NAMED JOHN"

Again today, as Sunday after Sunday in the course of the year, we shall turn to the fourth Gospel. The sermon bears the title, "A Man Named John"; and the text is the 6th verse of the 1st chapter of the Gospel according to John:

"There was a man sent from
God, whose name was John."

That's the way the writer in this fourth Gospel reverently refers to the Baptizer; for John was truly something else.

There are only two kinds of people, those to whom you react, and those for whom you have no reaction whatsoever....they make no impression upon you. John was the kind of person for whom you always had to have a reaction, and the reaction that you have to a person like John is always one of two kinds - - you either like him, or you dislike him. You can't possibly be neutral with a man like John.

For one thing, he was odd. In the jargon of today, he was an "oddball". That's exactly what he was. There wasn't anyone ever quite like him. And because he was as eccentric as he was, he tossed his generation into a fair degree of consternation. People were attracted to him because of his appearance. He had the appearance of a mad-man, almost of a wild man. He could not deny the fact that he was a man from the wilderness. He was a man who had a diet of locusts and wild honey. He was a man who refused to identify with society. His existence seemed constantly to be anti-social, it was forever hermitlike. He only went and associated with people when he felt driven to do so. He much preferred to isolate himself from them. His dress,

his habits, his demeanor, his manner of speaking....all these branded him the eccentric, the controversial one.

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But may I give you a bit of advice, ere this sermon moves on, even in this prefatory period: don't ever sell the odd completely short. God doesn't always work with the conventional, God doesn't always work with the traditional. We who are so tempted today, so easily tempted, when we're forced to move over a bit for the long hair and the unkempt beard, and the tight pants, and the constantly rebellious ones, the angry young generation that refuses, you see, to be put into the slot that we so easily want to put them into.....and then we become annoyed and irritated by them because we have to move over a bit -- they do jostle, you know, and they do push, and they will be heard. Whatever you do, don't sell all of them short. Every now and then you can well afford to listen, and to pay attention. You may not always agree with what they say, you may not always agree with the way they look. Our impatience with them may stem from the fact that it's a lot easier to handle the traditional, it's a lot easier to deal with the run of the mill. But the odd ones....to handle them takes a bit of doing, because we're never quite sure how the eccentric is going to react, that's exactly why he's eccentric.

Would I shock you if I were to tell you that our Blessed Lord had a good and kind word to say for this eccentric -- that our Blessed Lord said of John the Baptist what He never said of any other single human being, and yet it was the grandest and perhaps the finest thing that He could ever say of anybody: He said, of John the Baptist, "No one ever born of a woman was greater than he" -- this is the man that I want to talk to you a bit about this morning, a man named John.

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There was never anybody quite like him. Now this fact should not disturb you overmuch, because after it's all said and done, God doesn't deal in duplicates. You may not find this easy to accept, you may find it hard to believe, but you are not a duplicate. God's not a specialist in the carbon copy. In reality each of us is one of a kind. That's why your life is so important in God's sight. When He made you, He never made anybody else just like you. You may not have to be truly extraordinary, but maybe you could accept the fact that you are one of a kind.

But that's not the purpose of this sermon this morning. The purpose of this sermon is: how does one react when you come to recognize a person like John the Baptist, who was as wonderful as Jesus said he was? Do you say to yourself, well this excuses me somewhat - I can't expect Jesus to say anything as grand about me because I'm not as wonderful as a man like John. It's only every now and then, perhaps only once in a generation, that God from Heaven above puts down His finger and says, "John, you're my man for this generation - - John, there hasn't been anybody quite like you, and I'm especially calling you, I'm especially preparing you, I'm especially sending you out into the world".....and so immediately our reaction might be, we are prone to excuse ourselves - - well God only deals with one person like that, perhaps once in a generation. Me? While there may be no duplicates in my case, I'm still average...plain...ordinary - almost just like anybody else.

I'm inclined to think, the older I become, that while God may raise up a particular man for a particular purpose, and that this man may be extraordinary, in order to accomplish something unusually wonderful in the Kingdom, God raises him up not only because there's something He wants him to

do, but also that he might serve as an example, an influence for you and for me. The great, the grand and the good always serve in this capacity, and don't ever forget it. They are raised up as an example, that their influence may be for good upon us.

If you are willing to accept this, then, what now can be said as far as John the Baptist is concerned? How can he speak to you and how can he speak to me? -- this extraordinary man, what does he have to say to you, Mr. and Mrs. Ordinary Soul? Well this can be said. John the Baptist recognized himself as one who was sent from God. He just didn't happen. God was involved with his life, God put His stamp upon it, God put His mark upon it, God said, "Now you go out, and you live".....

....to a degree, God says this to every single one of us. For what is life but an expression of all that God is? -- that is, life lived in God's name. And when God gives us life, God holds us responsible for what we do with it. We Christians are always reminding ourselves of this. We say that life not only comes from God, life also returns to God. What do we say when somebody departs this life in the Christian Faith: they've gone to be with their Lord, they've gone to be with God. When the writer of the fourth Gospel was thinking of the life of the Baptizer, he said of him what ought to be said about any other single person -- "He came from God". John lived his years under the influence of this dynamic thought: "I am constrained to live, I am constrained to become -- "

Do you know what some of us believe to be the saddest thing to be said about many people in our generation: they've lost their sense of purpose, their life has no meaning, they simply exist. If they were hard-pressed to

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define their existence, they wouldn't be able to justify it. Bluntly speaking, there are any number of people who are simply taking up space. I can't think of anything more cruel to be said about life, than that this should ever happen, that one should live his days and live his years without meaning! without purpose! This is a lesson that you can learn from John the Baptizer - - he recognized himself as one who was sent, who had to live his years, and with meaning, and with a purpose.

Listen carefully before you take me to judgment, and brand what I am about to say as being heretic, but if I were a peculiar type of person who had no sense of sin, and had yet to become aware of a need for a Saviour, I think I would be drawn to the Christian Faith for this reason, and for this reason above all else, that in the Christian Faith I find that there is meaning and purpose given to my life. If I had to embrace it for that reason and for that reason alone, I would find it attractive. John the Baptist considered himself a man with a mission, a man with a purpose.

In the second place, when you think about his life, you find him as one who is possessed. He knew that he was God's man. Wherever he went he felt the sense of obligation to do the thing that was right in the sight of God. Whether you want it this way or not, the things that claim you in life leave their mark upon you. Each of us does become a marked man, each of us does become a branded person! Tell me your magnificent obsession....no, you won't have to - if you're at least forty years of age, you won't have to tell me -- it's self-revealing.....life can be as fair or as cruel as that! Wherever John the Baptist went, he equated his life with the purpose of God. When he spoke, it was God's word. Whatever he did, it was the kind of thing that God could say, "That's right, John - you are My man."

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I have been observing in recent months the unfolding of a life in particular, of one person that I've observed rather closely, and I find myself using the same words when I think of him occasionally - how increasingly plain it is being made that he's God's man. May I ask you, my friend, is that being made increasingly plain as you grow older? Are you the God-possessed?

The last thing that has to be said is that John the Baptist, extraordinary as he was, never pretended to be anything more nor less than he was. Now this may not mean very much to you until I remind you about John the Baptist. He was the man, incredible as it may be, who offered a kind of competition to Jesus Christ. In fact, there were some disciples who took pride in the fact that they were the disciples of John, when other people began talking about the fact that they were disciples of Jesus Christ. This is how powerful this man was! - - this is how persuasive a personality this extraordinary person was! - - a man for whom Jesus Christ could say, "No single human being born of a woman can compare with this man."!

As over against this, John, with the tonic of a wholesome pride, as the poet would put it, reminded himself of his great mission. He never forgot that he had the mark of God upon him. Yet, he never threw himself out of imbalance to the degree that he played the part of God, or even allowed himself to be made equal with Jesus Christ. That's how great a man he was. In fact, on occasion he said to people who came after him, "No, you're mistaken, I'm not the Messiah." Then they gave him the next-high complimentary gesture, "Are you that prophet?" And he said "No". And even though he was the recipient of all their honor and preferment, he still was constrained to

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say, "There stands one in your midst whom you do not recognize, but let me tell you this: I am not even worthy to get down on my hands and my knees and remove the sandals from his feet." Now it takes a bit of doing to become that kind of person. But it's within the possibility of you and me to be that faithful to God, that we can honestly see ourselves as the God-possessed, and as the God-called, and to run our course with complete humility.

I beg you, my friends, to take as your standard the ideal of a person like a man named John. I wish I could go back to every young person with whom I have ever had any kind of association. I wish that miraculously I could turn back these twenty-five years, and go back to that first Confirmation class, each succeeding class, even as I endeavor to do it now, and to say to all who are young, - - set up for yourself the ideal - - strive after the extraordinary! - - let your ~~en~~ intentions be noble....

...to the girls I would say - take as your standard a woman named Mary, a woman named Elizabeth, a woman named Hannah....

...to the boys I would say, reflecting something of the language of the Sunday Schools days of a generation ago - "Dare To Be a Daniel" - set for yourself the standard of the Bible hero....

...you may not match them, but in following after them you'll be far better than you would have been if you had never reached out for the stars.

Tonight when you say your prayers, and you find yourself reflecting in the grace and the love of God, whose mercy constantly surrounds you,

will you be able to say....

"God, people know that I'm yours....

"God, there's no question in their mind - I bear
your mark! - - "

...could you talk as honestly as that?

When I go back to that quiet place in Pennsylvania, there is the old church yard. Winifred's ancestors are buried there. They came from Germany shortly after the turn of the nineteenth century. It was not at all unusual for them to write on their headstones a verse of Scripture.

If you were to write your own epitaph, I have no idea what you might choose. I don't know who chose the epitaphs that I read in that church yard on the side of the hill. But let me tell you one that you might strive for - - when your days are ended, people might look back over your life and say,

"He was a person sent from God"

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"EVERY MAN"

The sermon for the day bears the title, "Every Man"; and the text is again in the first chapter of the Gospel according to John, and it's the 9th verse:

"That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world."

Ask any writer what he may on occasion think his greatest problem to be, and quite surprisingly he may say his editor. For you see, his editor serves as the conscience for the readership; and the editor is in duty bound to go over very carefully what the writer has prepared. For the editor tries to see it through the eyes of the people who will do the reading.

It's not at all uncommon, then, for the man who is doing the writing to want to say a particular thing in a very specific way. He has his own choice of words, and he himself out of his prior experience knows exactly why he wants to use that word. But when he sits down with his editor, his editor may say, "I'm not so sure that you've chosen the best possible word. When someone reads your article for the first time, he may have some difficulty in understanding exactly what you mean by this word in particular." Then, you see, there is this tension between the writer and the editor, and ultimately the reader himself. For there are some times when the writer feels constrained to use a certain word - - he must use it, because he knows what that word means. He has the reverence for it, you see, he has all that has preceded it by way of experience. And this may not be true, then, for the man who picks the article up for the first time and reads it, even casually.

This could be your experience when you read the Bible. Maybe you could welcome the opportunity of having the writer of any one book stand alongside of you, and then as you read the words thoughtfully, you might say -- "Why this word? -- why do you put it in this manner?"

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I would be happy indeed, if standing alongside of me now, in your presence, would be the writer of the fourth Gospel. For you see, I've chosen a particular text which serves as the basis for this sermon, and in the preparation of this sermon I've asked certain questions....

...John, writer of the Fourth Gospel, let me ask you in the presence of these people about to hear this sermon -- why have you used this modifier?

...John, why do you say, He was the true Light?

-- why must you introduce that word true?

Isn't it sufficient to say, Jesus Christ is the Light of the world?

And then John would say to us, presumably,

"Aha, it is necessary that I say this, because for the moment at least you're forgetting something -- that every teacher believes himself to be a shedder of light"

...what is the symbol that we have for learning, and education? Isn't it always the burning lamp? Don't we say that the truly educated person is the man who is made free from the darkness which is ignorance -- the truly educated person is the man who is made free from the darkness which is fear -- the truly educated person is the man who is made free from the darkness which is prejudice.....and John would say to us, "You have to remember

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that Jesus was not the first teacher. There were many people who came before Jesus. There will be many people who will come after Jesus. I've lived closely enough with Jesus Christ, that I came to understand in no uncertain manner that none can compare with Him. I'm not saying that the others are completely in error. I am saying they are not perfect. I am saying they are not the true Light."

You see, one really can't make enough of this, because even in our day and age there are many people who, wittingly or unwittingly, equate Jesus Christ as just another teacher. John had come to know Him, and he wanted everybody to know that Jesus Christ was in a class by Himself.. "He is the true Light." And when a man comes to know Jesus Christ, all that he ought to know about God, all that he ought to know about his fellow men, all that he ought to know about himself is revealed perfectly and completely in Jesus Christ.

Well for the moment at least, we'd say to John, keep your modifier there, I think I understand what you mean by the true Light. And then we'd go on, you see, talking back to the writer, or perhaps talking back to the preacher. One of my colleagues in the ministry in Williamsport was the Pastor of Covenant Central Presbyterian Church. After a very successful pastorate there he was called to a university town, and his new parish was on the edge of the campus. His first service was at nine o'clock in the morning, then the second morning service, and the last of the morning services, was at eleven, which meant that he had an hour free between ten and eleven. And this is what he decided to do. He went downstairs in the great hall beneath the nave and there he was met by a group of students who had

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gathered together, who had heard him preach at nine o'clock. Then they fed back to him their reactions, then they made him prove, not only his concepts, but quite frequently the very word that he had chosen deliberately -- "Why did you say it this way?" Well you see, in much that same spirit we're doing this with the writer of the fourth Gospel now..."why do you say the true Light?"

We read on in the sentence. And now we come to something that really puzzles us, which at first blush, if I know you aright, you're not about to accept --

"And that was the true Light, which
lighteth every man"

...ah, come now John, you don't mean that! Every man?

You see, out of our own experience we wouldn't put it that way. We are the formers of judgment. We have a way of believing that there are some people who are incapable of appreciating even God. We have a way of thinking that there are some people who are absolutely insensitive to the truth. Yes, we do. When we begin to think like that, we limit God, and God's power and God's grace and God's Spirit. If you read history at all, you'll discover at certain periods of time this has caused men no end of grief, because we've raised a superior stock, we've raised certain nationalities who believe themselves to be so far above other people. Page after page in history indicates this. This is the meaning of class struggle. This is the meaning of minority groups and their pressures. They refuse to be excluded -- they will be recognized....they will state their claim, and they won't have anybody looking down their noses at them. This is a matter of

history....it's an established fact.

How John, who had such a precious spiritual insight, knows human nature. He also knows Jesus Christ. And that's why deliberately he said, "This is the true Light, that lightens every man that comes into the world."

Before you came to church this week, as was true for other weeks as well, you found an extract of the sermon, just a sentence or two, on the front page of the MESSENGER. The extract that you read appears now at this particular point in this particular sermon - -

" - - there are some words that do not belong in the vocabulary of a Christian. 'Exclusive' is one of those words. Perchance we can keep from using it, but all too seldom do we keep from thinking it. We have a way of keeping Christ to ourselves or to our kind, and usually quite unwittingly. We may not deliberately intend it that way. But recall for yourself the last time you were found in a company of Christians. They were, weren't they, for the most part very much your own kind, reflecting to a large degree your culture, your attitudes, your station in life? - - "

...we're always more secure that way. One of the basic weaknesses that you and I have is that we're always looking for somebody who thinks the way we think - - we always want to be in the company of those who confirm our opinions. We become so insecure when we're outside our own little group.

I have been in the ministry long enough to know that it would break my heart if I were pastor of a parish made up of little groups, and each one drawing around itself a kind of circle, and that circle being formed for any one of a number of different reasons....and then anybody who might not be within that group being given to understand that he wasn't to be accepted by

by that group. John says, I tell you Jesus Christ is the true Light that gives light to every man. Where God is concerned, none of us has any superior position.

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Now it may not be too bad, this I am willing to admit, that you and I should seek our level, that you and I should respond to kindred spirits. I am willing to admit that it might not be too bad....but honestly, there is a danger, and that danger is this, that as soon as you level off to your own kind forever, you automatically become exclusive, and the danger is most acute in the realm of religion, for religion always involves our relationship with other people. The root meaning of the ~~maxim~~ word religion is 'to be tied to God' -- and no man can be tied to God without being tied to his brother.

In company with you I cherish one verse in Scripture in particular above all others. You know at once what it is: John 3:16 - the Gospel in the Gospel....."For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." I am always caught short when I read that verse, because all too frequently I find myself believing that the verse was not meant to say what it actually says. Every now and then I permit myself to believe that God loves me, and my kind! -- and I don't much, through this verse of Scripture, lift my eyes beyond my own limited horizon. I have a way of praying to God much more intently for those who are nearest and dearest to me.

I am always caught short when I read this verse of Scripture because it doesn't say "For God so loved the Christians" -- no it doesn't! - it's

"God so loved the world".....because it is exactly as it is, therefore, then, I cannot afford to become exclusive racially, culturally, politically, economically.....and get ready now! -- not even religiously. Jesus, says John, is the true Light, and His light is meant for every man.

Now what does light do? Light performs a useful purpose, it seems to me, in two ways.

One is, light reveals, makes things plain. That's what truth does. Those of us who have been fortunate enough to travel in the Near East carry back with us good memories of the bazaars in the old city of Jerusalem, those narrow streets, you see, and then the bazaar with the shops, a square-like enclosure with a roof but no windows.....and I can still see a man about to buy a piece of silver, or a piece of beaten brass-work. What does he do? -- he takes it away from the shop, away from the shadows, out into the street where the light falls upon it, and there he puts it to the test, that it might reveal all of its flaws, all of its weaknesses. This is what Jesus Christ does, says John -- He is the Light that reveals our basic weaknesses.

There are some people, therefore, who are afraid of the light, they are afraid to come out of the darkness, because a thing could be seen for what it really is. It takes a daring man and a brave man to expose himself to the Light of Jesus Christ. This is where, sometimes, the counselling sessions that I have with people bog down. We get along fairly swimmingly, they seem to enjoy talking, and then by the grace of God, there's something I'm supposed to say, and when I am true to my calling, I inject what all too often is ignored -- the principle of Christian conviction: what, in the

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light of Scriptural truth now, is to be said? - - how does this whole thing that we have been talking about stack up according to the mind and the purpose of God?.....and then every now and then they begin to shy away, the conversation takes another turn.

Light not only reveals, light also transforms. The traveler who goes to Italy may find himself in an Italian village, not the most attractive - - dingy, the streets are narrow, evidence of filth....then the sun breaks through. Surprising how much warmth and character a narrow, filthy cobblestone road can have! - - amazing how the tiles on the roof can be transformed by the gentle rays of the sun! This is what the light of God's love and the light of God's truth can do for human nature.

I know a woman who has a measure of delight in arranging flowers, and when she arranges flowers in her home, she always makes certain that the flowers benefit by the light that is available in that room, that they stand out in the most precious manner. We ought to do that with human beings. We ought to somehow put people where the light of God's love falls upon them. It's amazing how their characters can be made transformed, when we allow something of the light of God's love to fall upon them.

John remembers that Jesus said, "I am the Light of the world." He also said, "Ye are the light of the world." What does that mean? It simply means that as I find myself in God's presence and believe in God's love, then I must deal with other men in the same way. As God is my Light, so I should be a light to somebody else. The tragedy of life is that for too many of us, we cast the shadow of darkness.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"THE TRUE CHURCH"

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The sermon bearing the title, "The True Church" is based upon the Gospel for the day; the text, the 31st and 32nd verses of the 8th chapter of John:

"Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If you continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

Let me begin with two quotations, neither of which, I dare say, will give you much cause for happiness, but rather - each in its own way will be a very arresting thought, prick your mind and disturb your conscience.

The first is a quotation from John Wesley. It was John Wesley, you know, who went up and down England, preaching the saving grace of Jesus Christ, who took the church that was dear to his heart to task, and believed earnestly that the church must go where the people are. Getting up early in the morning, he preached wherever he found a company of people, continuing even until rather late hours of the night. When word had come to John Wesley that one of his own family was no longer going to continue in the church tradition which meant so much to him, but rather became a convert to another brand of the Christian faith, John Wesley said,

"One can be saved in any church....

...one can be danned in any church."

The second quotation is from one of the early Church fathers -- Augustine, no less. Augustine has said, that,

"Many that the church has on her rolls, God does not have on His rolls; and many whom God has on His rolls, the church does not have on her rolls."

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....what, then, will you do with two statements like these? Do they not trouble your soul? Do they not disturb you a bit? For will you not ask the questions that must be asked -- how can I know, then, whether I am part of the true church? -- if this could be said about the Body of Believers, if this could be said about the Bride of Christ -- if men so great and learned and zealous as these can offer such an indictment against us, what assurance do I have that I am part of the true church?

One doesn't have to turn the pages of history to find people who talk like this. You have friends and you have neighbors who would never so much as give a second thought to embracing the brand of the Christian faith which is so dear to you. They would never think of becoming Lutheran. And yet this means a great deal to you! When you walk with some of these folks, and when you talk with them, and when you learn a little bit about their appreciation for the Christian faith, you would never think of forsaking your Lutheran tradition and becoming what they are! Each believes in his own way that perhaps he has the true approach.

One of the questions that's put in an interesting pamphlet that our church provides inquires is this: Do Lutherans believe that theirs is the only true religion?.....imagine anyone ever putting a question like that! But then listen to the answer: Yes -- but they also believe that they are not the only ones who have it.

....Do Lutherans believe that theirs is the true religion? Yes.

...but we don't believe that we're the only ones who have it.

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What, then, are the marks of the true church? Significantly enough, in the Gospel lesson for this day, which is Reformation Sunday, one may find the marks of the true church, spoken by our Blessed Lord Himself.... and who has a greater right to speak than He who is the Head of the Church? Let me tell you a little bit about it.

These verses appear as part of a debate that was going on between Jesus Christ and the leaders of the established church of His day. They argued about one thing after another. They knew a great measure of delight in arguing with Jesus. You know, there are some people who think they have done their duty by God, just by arguing - when they feel they have a point, they become firmly entrenched, you see. So these people came to Jesus - - not that they were devoutly concerned with what He had to say, but perchance because they were thrilled with the sound of their own voices! And by arguing, you see, they had a chance to become part of it. So they came to Jesus Christ.

The debate continues....until you come to what is the part, now, that serves as the basis for this sermon. And all of a sudden the debate provides an interlude which becomes a dialogue. For a while they quit talking at one another, and begin to talk with one another....and our Blessed Lord said to those who were beginning to believe in Him, to those people who had believed in Him, "If ye continue in my word, then you will be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."

Point One: "To people who believed on him"

...He said what He said.

Would you accept this, then, as the first mark of the true church?
-- based upon belief in the Person of Jesus Christ. If you want to know whether or not you are part of the true church, then let me ask you, how real is Jesus Christ to you?

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We've done it now by matter of habit, and very properly so, but every time a New Members Group gathers for the first time -- can't you picture it now, up in the Luther Room -- perhaps some of you right now recall so quickly and enthusiastically how you were part of such a fellowship....

....it's the first time that we gathered together....and then the Pastor of this church says something that is always spoken the first evening. Let it be understood that we're not here tonight just because we want to add more names to the congregational roll of Saint Luke Church. Let it be understood that we're not primarily interested in making Lutherans out of Baptists, Methodists, Roman Catholics or Presbyterians. Let it be understood, now, that when we come together our primary concern is our commitment to Jesus Christ...and if Jesus Christ can become more real to you, and you are given opportunity to witness in His name through this parish, then come, let us talk together about membership.....

...membership in this congregation must become vital, and primarily, an expression of commitment to Jesus Christ. This is the first mark of the true church: personal commitment, personal belief in the Saviour.

For what is the church, except the body of believers gathered together

by the Holy Spirit? -- a company of people who have one thing in common: each is committed to Jesus Christ...and each makes his commitment in his own name.

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Martin Luther tells in one of his writings about a man who met a peasant in the woods, and he said to him, as he engaged him in conversation, "What is your idea of religion? What do you believe?" Immediately the peasant said, "I believe what the Church believes".....and then Martin Luther gave a tirade on that score. For, said Martin Luther, and very properly so, it isn't basically what the Church believed, it's what you, as a member of the Church, believe, that's important. No man can write his own religious experience off in anybody else's name. The Church is made up of people who have individually committed themselves to Jesus Christ. He may be strengthened by the Company of Believers, he may be encouraged in knowing that he belongs to a group of people who believe certain things together, but no one man can write his religious experience off in somebody else's name, not even the Church! Said Jesus Christ, to those who believed in Him -- "You shall be my disciples." This is the mark, the first mark, of the true church: that it is a company of people committed to Him -- who acknowledge Him as Lord and Saviour.

Now I must ask you this question because I am the shepherd and bishop of your souls -- is this paramount in your thinking? It's risky business, perhaps, for me to put it this way, but I'm constrained to do it -- in the practice of the Christian religion, do you think first of the Lutheran Church? Do you think first of Saint Luke Congregation?or will you do what you do, whatever it may be, because you are constrained by faith in Jesus Christ,

to say what you say, to do what you do, to become what you are? The true mark, the first true mark of the true church: commitment to Jesus Christ.

The second thing is: the deliberate attempt on the part of the people who, having confessed faith in Jesus Christ, to act as His disciples....

"- - to those who believed on him, He said,

you must continue in my word - - "

This is why the Lutheran Church, if you'll permit me to say it now quite parenthetically, makes so much of the proclamation of the Grace of God. That's why we ask everyone who is ordained into the ministry to become, above all else, preachers of the Word, Bible preachers, if you please.... for how can we be nurtured unless we are taught the Word?...how can we be properly motivated, unless we are engendered by the precious Gospel itself?

Now I must ask you this question: how are you coming along in your nurture by the Word? How diligently do you study the sacred Scriptures? How earnestly will you come Sunday after Sunday and say to yourself, when the man comes to the sacred desk, "God, speak Thy Word through him. It is Your Word that I must hear. It's Your direction that I must find."
...said our Lord Jesus Christ, "If ye continue in my word" - - to those who have given evidence of their belief in Him He said the second thing. The second true mark of the Church is steadfastness in the faith, the faith proclaimed in Jesus Christ.

I am always disturbed, once a sermon has been preached, because once a sermon has been preached, I say to myself: did it proclaim Jesus Christ?did it usher people into the very Presence of God?...did it reveal the pressure of God's hand upon their shoulder?...did the sermon itself say to

people, this is the way - walk in it? Said our Lord Jesus Christ, "this you must remember, it's never enough to believe, you must continue in My word. Then shall you be My disciples indeed."

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The third real mark of the true church....not only is she steadfast in what she says she believes, but does she honestly practice what she professes? When I went to India they told me that it's not at all unusual for those who are committed to Jesus Christ to gather around the wandering preacher (much of the preaching is done outside the church). And the first group to come will always be those who have already committed themselves to Christ. Can you picture it now? Here is the Evangelist, standing right here, and then he is ringed by a group of people who have already made their commitment to Jesus Christ. They are figuratively and literally, the inner circle. And you'll always find this to be true in India, they are the curious ones.... Let a man stand anywhere, and he'll attract a group of people, no matter what he's talking aboutthen beyond this first ring come the people who are the curious ones - - what's this man talking about?...and then they look at the people to whom he's talking, and then they know by this time that these people to whom he's talking directly are the Christians.

The Evangelist will tell you this, he knows that everything that he's saying will be recognized for its true worth by the character and the integrity of the people to whom he is saying it, and that these people on the outer ring will listen to what he has to say, and believe it, as they can find evidence in the lives of the inner circle that they are practising what the preacher is proclaiming. This is the third mark of the true church: does

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she practise what she proclaims? - - will she sacrifice herself? - - will she identify herself with the needs of humanity? The great danger of the church is always that she will live for herself, just as an individual will live for himself.....the church can become self-centered, just as a person can become self-centered. But the church must always remind herself that she is to be Christo-centric.

I am grateful as your Pastor for people who speak with so great appreciation for Saint Luke Church. But sometimes I am sorely troubled when I do not find them speaking with so great enthusiasm for the Head of the Church. There are many people who would do almost anything for a church, and yet hesitate to do what Jesus Christ Himself basically requires from them as individuals. There is a difference that must be respected here and cannot be ignored. The true mark of the church is always the evidence by people who practice what they say they believe about their Lord and their Saviour. If He is the Saviour of men, then this church must be seen as the instrument of salvation.

You won't be pleased by what I am going to tell you now, but it could be that for a great many of you this morning, you almost treated with indifference the announcement that another group of new members would be received today.....you almost reacted in a very casual way that in this group there would be two people who for the first time in their lives will publicly profess faith in Jesus Christ, acknowledge Him as Lord and Saviour. This is what Saint Luke Church exists for! - - that people should be saved - - they should come into a saving knowledge of the Grace of God in Jesus Christ.

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I'm always troubled by the people who in one way or another make known to me that they haven't the slightest idea of certain things that are happening through this church, because there are the committed ones who are going out and identifying themselves in the name of Jesus Christ, on a neighborhood basis. I wouldn't think of embarrassing you, but it's appeared two or three times in the MESSENGER in the last two or three years....the Linden Project...the Lyttonsville Project - - - in my book, it's a bona fide evidence of people identifying themselves in the name of Jesus Christ! It's happening. And some of you don't know a thing about it, and maybe you couldn't care less!

Every now and then in the life of this congregation I find someone who takes it upon himself to personally identify himself with somebody else, to suffer with that person in his weakness, to be patient with that person in his ignorance. It's happening. We are the better because of it. And it's a true mark of the church, and it won't appear on any annual report. But without it, we would be less than worthy of the name of a church of Jesus Christ.

This whole matter of the "true church" is not really a proposition of organization. It is always and above all else personal commitment to Him who is alone the Head of the Church, Jesus Christ Himself. Our Lord spelled this out very clearly and carefully a long time ago, and in doing so He stressed the meaning of such terms as "my word" and "my disciples". He even went so far as to say "my church". It was only afterward that He dealt in such things as "truth" and "freedom." I close with one simple observation - - if you want to know whether or not you are part of a really true church, then ask yourself this question: Would Jesus Christ be at home?

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"ONE MAN'S VENTURE IN FAITH"

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The sermon, based upon the Gospel for the day, bears the title, "One Man's Venture in Faith"; the text, from the 4th chapter of the Gospel according to John, the 46th and the 47th verses:

"So Jesus came again into Cana of Galilee, where he made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum. When he heard that Jesus was come out of Judaea into Galilee, he went unto him, and besought him that he would come down, and heal his son: for he was at the point of death."

It's right and proper that every now and then when you read the Scriptures, you should ask for the liberty, albeit the luxury, of using a sanctified imagination. Here in front of you is the actual record, cold impersonal black and white printed page. If you don't watch yourself, you might read it in a very prosaic fashion. But here is drama. Here is the encounter of a human soul with God. Why don't you, then, ask God to help you to imagine how it probably happened, or perhaps how it might have happened.

Should we begin in this way, giving some degree of credence to a legend, a legend that says once upon a time there were men who came to John, who bore the title, 'The Beloved Disciple' and said, "John, you were a little nearer to Jesus than the rest of us. We accept the fact that you had insights that we did not have. We think you ought to reduce to writing your impression of the life of the Master. Let us see Christ through your eyes.....let us understand Him through your heart."

Legend has it then that John said, "I will agree, but on one condition, that you join me in prayer, and we'll pray for several days and we'll pray for several nights, and then if I believe that God wants me to do it, I will do it."

Now if you accept it for the moment at least, for whatever good it may be, then take another step, asking God to help you imagine a situation like this, when some of them read this as another draft of what he had written, and when they came to this 4th chapter, they said....

..."John, now you're writing copy that people will read - - "

...not as crassly, perhaps, as all that, but this is what they probably meant to say - -

- - "Give us more of the human interest angle. You've got something here, John....here's a nobleman, a man with prestige and position, a man whose son is sick. What home won't readily understand this?....a man who has heard about the itinerant carpenter's son, who was the miracle worker, and the man who made a journey of some twenty, twenty-five miles on foot to bring his problem to Jesus Christ - - to humble himself, and to beg a blessing!
- - and, John, you've really got something here when you make known to us how the miracle occurred - and Jesus didn't even see the boy - Re didn't even touch him....and how remarkable is this man's venture in faith, when he simply takes the word of Jesus for it, walks all the way

back all those twenty-five miles, only to discover that he's being greeted by his servants, who say, "Your son's alive!"

....John, you've gotten the right ending to the story all right, when you say the man believed, and all his family, and they surrendered themselves to Jesus Christ... - - John, people will read this, and they'll read it with understanding and with profit, as a measure of encouragement and inspiration - - "

.....well it might have happened like that.

It also might have happened in this way, when they said, "John, can we give some titles to some of these sub-sections?" It may be rank presumption on my part when I suggest to you now, that John might have said, "I'm willing to settle at this point, that if you call this encounter "One Man's Venture in Faith".....

....I'm also inclined to think that John might have said, "But whatever else you do, don't you dare call it "Religion Made Easy in Three Simple Steps"!

Now I'll tell you why I say all this. It's a tremendous thing when a man comes to Jesus Christ and believes that He is able to work a miracle. It's an equally tremendous thing, when having been the recipient of God's favor, a man responds with a grateful heart and surrenders his life to Jesus Christ. This is the meaning of religion: to be encountered by the fact of God, and to allow surrender to be your response.

But it's never an easy thing. Even a cursory reading of this passage of Scripture which serves as the Gospel lesson for today may indicate that it happened - - one - - two - - three.....

...the man says something....Jesus says something.....the

man goes home - his son is alive....and the man

says, "Jesus, from now on I'll live my life your way."

...it looks simple, but it isn't.

There was a time in my ministry when I honestly believed that I could say to people, "Well, all you have to do is surrender your life to Jesus Christ".....or as somebody came along given to slogans:

LET GO - LET GOD

I've never had much stock in religion by slogans. For the longer I live and the more I deal with people, the more impatient I become with those who would lead me to believe that there's such a thing as instantaneous re-orientation of a man's life.

Now don't misunderstand me. There may be the moment of conversion, and the beginning of a glorious transformation, but a man doesn't drop down from heaven full-fashioned as a saint, in a minute's time.

But you see, this is the problem that some of us have, because religion offers such a wonderful blessing, because the end result is as great as it is, we think that it can be had in a moment's time! I had a doctor friend two decades ago who told me he despised the day that the laity ever discovered such a term as "wonder drugs." He said, they come into my office, they expect me to write out a prescription: 2 pink pills and a green one - - tomorrow morning at ten o'clock the color in the cheeks is restored, the

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ache in the muscles is gone, the spring in the step has returned, and the light in the eyes is there! There are moments when perhaps there might be immediate relief, but in more cases than you may care to admit, contributing factors have been at work over a long period of time, and the doctor and the nurses and the technician have to make a long period of investment until the person is fully restored.

Now sometimes we have a way of carrying this over into the realm of religion. We push a kind of spiritual panic button, and we expect God immediately to transform the sinner into a full-fledged saint! I think I can tell you this on good authority. You remember one time there was a man by the name of Saul who had a great conversion experience -- a tremendous thing! -- highly dramatic.....but don't forget for a single minute that after the conversion experience had occurred, there were weeks and months, and maybe years, while he had all this soul struggle in the house of Ananias in Damascus. Human as he was, there must have been times when he wondered whether he had done the right thing in saying yes to Jesus Christ. There were obstacle courses that had to be encountered.

It's always a perplexing thing for me as a pastor when people come to me, to wonder how much I ought to give them in the first interview -- -- whether I can deliver the whole story, with all the demands that God will make, because there are some people who will ~~ix~~ shy away when they find out that God's not about to snap His divine finger, and presto! chango! right now! -- I will love everybody, and what's more miraculous, everybody's going to love me! -- and then life is just one beautiful thing from that moment on. It doesn't happen that way.

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In the Gospel lesson for today we have a story with a wonderful ending: a man believes, and his whole household...but it wasn't an easy thing. There were three steps, all right, but they were not three easy steps. You have religion all right, but it isn't religion made easy. Let your own experience confirm what I am saying.

Point number one: the man recognized his need. He saw himself as a dependent creature. A proud man with prestige and position, he walks for twenty-five miles to have an interview, with whom? -- the son of a little-known carpenter -- to have interview with an itinerant preacher.

...most of us are proud people. This is always part of our problem. And even in the matter of religion we think we can have a do-it-yourself brand....

This man said, "I can't go any farther. God must be part of this picture. I am in need." And so he came. It looks easy, but man is by nature a proud person. That's why he sins -- because of his pride he has more faith in his own way of handling a situation than God's. Step number one: a man says, "God has something that I need. I will go to God and I will ask Him for it."

Step number two: the promise of God's bestowal of a blessing, to believe that it's there. But it's not always an easy thing to believe that it's ~~xxxx~~ there when God Himself asks you to run a kind of obstacle course. There are some things that God will give you only as you reach this point in your development. You want to get them when you're right here. God's greater blessing may be given only when He has taken you from here to here.

And ever so often you and I want to settle at this point -- to get every-
thing that God has to give. What was the obstacle course that God asked,
through Christ, this man to run? It's as simple as this, "Mister, unless
you see signs and wonders, you're not going to believe!"

I'd better amplify that for /you. Jesus had come back to the same
section where He had performed His first miracle. The word had gotten
around that He was a miracle-sorker -- He snaps His finger -- miracles
happened! He said a word -- and water was changed into wine!....so people
came to see Him, out of fascination.

Jesus Christ is not about to work miracles just to entertain people,
just to give them a degree of fascination....and so He must have cut this
fellow to the core when He said, "Don't tell me you're another one of these
people who won't believe unless you see something deamatic happen." The
encounter is expressed in this manner. The man says, "I only know one thing,
that my son is sick - he's going to die! -- come!"

It's not a simple thing to reduce it to something like that. Most of
us are unable to recognize the crucial aspect of our problem. I say to you
with all the ardor of my soul, invariably our every relationship with God,
it has to be reduced to that! And it's not an easy thing for us to do it,
to say either - or, God....if you don't come into the picture, God, then I
have no hope.

Step number three: the man walks all the way back. He says, "Jesus,
you have only to speak the word and my son will be healed.".....turns around
and he walks back.....before he gets home the servants run and say to
him, "It's happened - your son is well.".....and then as a result, the

the man says, "All right, Jesus, I surrender -- you can have my life, and my family's as well."

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I tell you, this is not religion in three easy steps, because the third is the most difficult of all steps! It's one thing to come to Jesus Christ with your heart's desire -- it's an entirely different matter, when once you get your heart's desire, to give Him your heart. Discourtesy is the word that I have for people who turn to God and ask for a favor, and then in unbelief turn away, don't think that they'll get it. Gross ingratitude is my word for those who, once they get a blessing, will not offer the blessing that they have been given in God's name from that moment on. He is a demanding God. God will give, but what God gives He also requires that it be used in His name.

I'm thrilled when I read this passage of Scripture -- a man whose faith was as great as that!then once he received the blessing -- "How can I choose but give you my heart from this moment on!" This is a venture in faith.

You have no right to call yourself a religious person, my friend, unless yours is a venture in faith. How far has your venture taken you?

Have you reached step one? -- I'm in need, God. Give me a blessing.

Have you reached step two? -- I know you can do it, God, and I'm willing to take what you give.

Have you reached step three? -- God, you've given me hands, you've given me help
God, you've given me a heart by which
to feel the pain of the world!

God, you've given me eyes by which

to see a brother in need.

Out of gratitude, God, I'll live for

you, I'll love for you, I'll labor

for you.....

There's no venture in all the world like the venture in faith.

Stick with it. It has a glorious ending.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"A MAN NAMED PHILIP"

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The sermon for today bears the title, "A Man Named Philip"; the text, portions of the 43rd and the 44th verses of the 1st chapter of the Gospel according to John:

" - - and Jesus came and found Philip and said
to him, Follow me - - Philip found Nathanael - "

It had to come to this, soon or late, in any understanding of the Christian message. Eventually, always a face; eventually, always a person. When some of us begin reading the Gospel according to John we would shy away from it. We weren't quite certain why this should be so. Then, upon reflection, it occurred to us that the opening verses of John's Gospel deal with philosophical and theological terms. Remember such words as these - - God.... light....life....darkness....witness....glory....grace....truth....Lamb of God. Even the beginning is enough to keep one at a safe distance. Instead of talking about Mary and Joseph and the Baby Jesus in the manger, the Nativity is pictured in a philosophical term: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.....without him nothing was made that was made....in him was light and life and in that life was the light of men....."

...there may be a season when you talk about God in philosophical and theological terms.

But you must come to the point when you temporarily put your ideas and your concepts and your words aside, and then you deal specifically with peo-

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ple. He gives us this marvelous philosophical concept of God as the Word, and then before he even gets mid-way in his first chapter, he says, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." The idea of God became a person. And before he ends his first chapter, John is telling us about Jesus, John is telling us about a man named Andrew, a man named Simon Peter, a man named Philip, a man named Nathanael.

This is exactly the way it must be. You can't possibly talk about the Christian faith without talking about people. It's one thing to talk about love....but love has no meaning until you meet a person who personifies love. It's one thing to talk about truth....but truth will not set your soul marching until you find one person who embodies truth. It's one thing to talk about beauty....but beauty itself may have little significance for you and for me until we find one person whose soul is beautiful. Soon or late it had to come to this. John talks about these abstract ideas of God, and before he ends his first chapter he's talking about a man names Philip.

And when you come to deal with this whole wonderful aspect of the truth of the Christian faith, you recognize that here was set in action the original chain reaction: God in Christ -- Christ coming to Andrew -- Andrew going to Peter -- Christ coming to Philip -- Philip going to Nathanael.....and would you believe me if I were to tell you, you magnify this a million times and more and eventually your name will appear on the list!.....because that's the way the Kingdom is spread, person-to-person, person-through-person, person-by-person.

How does one come to Christ? How does one find himself in the company of disciples? How is a person won to Jesus Christ? When I read this first

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chapter very closely I come to what appears as a discrepancy. John in one verse says, "Jesus found Philip" - - in another verse shortly thereafter, Philip is going to Nathanael and he says, "We found Jesus!" Come now, which is correct? Do we find God? or does God find us? There are any number of books written upon this subject. There are those who tell us it's rank presumption for any man to think that he can find God, that you and I become aware of God only as He is pleased to reveal Himself to us. There are those who interpret Luther's treatment of the Third Article of the Creed, by which it's made plain to us that the Holy Spirit illumines our lives....it's God who enters our heart....it's God who says, "See! Look at me!" - - that these things could not happen if God were not the Gracious One, if God did not take the initiative, if God did not tell us what to look for, even when He reveals Himself.

It could be that John is absolutely right on either score - - Philip found Jesus Christ - - - Jesus Christ found Philip. It happened because Philip was on Christ's calling list. It happened because Philip ardently longed to see the face of Jesus Christ.

When it's all said and done, Christ becomes real only to the man who wants Christ to become real. Remember those lines of Browning's Bishop:

"What think ye of Christ," friend? When
All's done and said,
Like you this Christianity or not?
It may be false, but will you wish it true?
Has it your vote to be so if it can?

...maybe in the final analysis this is the point that cannot be ignored: how much does a man want to see Jesus Christ? - - how much does a man want God to become real to him?

Each of us may be fortunate enough to carry away from his home his memories that are always tied up with some kind of a religious experience. My mother was not well-versed in the Scriptures, my mother has had limited education possibilities. But she's one to whom God is very real. I recall those years when, as one among six children, she'd gather us together...

...my father was a typical immigrant ^{peddler} ~~peasant~~, who went walking from village to village with two heavy suitcases, one on either side, the load made a bit easier by the leather strap that was around his shoulders. Sometimes he'd be gone for weeks at a time....

...I can still see my mother, gathering us together, all six of us children, one right after the other, like a mother hen gathers her chicks, and we'd have a period of devotions. She didn't read from the Bible - she doesn't read very well, but she'd gather us together in a certain spot in a certain room....there hanging on the wall was an interpretation of Christ knocking at the door, an adaptation of Holman Hunt's "Light of the World." Christ is on the outside of the door, He's knocking. That was a kind of altar for us, that was the focal point. For her it meant that we were near Jesus when we got to that picture. She found it helpful to use such assistance.

Then, I can't remember whether it was she who told us, or whether it was when the pastor came to call, and he made some reference to the painting. At any rate, I still remember that this was said: Christ came to that door, but He'll never get inside until the people on the inside open the door, until the people on the inside want Him to come in! Philip wanted

very much to see Jesus. That's why in one place the Scripture has it "Jesus found Philip" and in another place it's Philip saying, "We found Jesus!" In this whole matter of Christian experience there must be the desire to be apprehended by God. How much do you want it so?

Then immediately we notice that once Philip was found by Jesus Christ, Philip becomes the-disciple-with-the-half-turned face. You may call him that and very properly so. But don't read less into this than what ought to be considered. For such a descriptive is meant to be a very high compliment. Remember the way the Scriptures deal with this man Philip? In a very grand way we are told that Jesus said to him "Follow me" and immediately the new disciple went and got Nathanael! As he looked to his new Master, he also turned in the direction of someone who-was-yet-to-be-won for Jesus Christ. That leads us to the second observation: in this whole matter of Christian experience there must be the desire to be found by Christ....and then secondly, that once you have been found by Christ, you are not content until you tell somebody else.

They tell me that when the Presbyterians did their work in Korea at the very beginning, a number of generations ago, they very wisely lay down a fundamental principle. First of all, they told people about Jesus Christ, and they lay down the necessity for baptism if one would become a member of the family of God. And then they made it plain that if any man wanted to be baptized, then he had to bring with him another convert -- he would not be baptized until he first brought with him another candidate for the Christian faith. This, you see, was the definite attest as to how sincere he was and how vital his experience was. Philip was found by Christ, then

Philip found Nathanael. I beg you with all the ardor of my soul to recognize the fundamental truth, that that's exactly the way it happens! - - - person-to-person, person-through-person, person-by-person.

When I look at you as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, I think I could see in many instances three different faces.

First of all, I see you, as one who is committed to Jesus Christ.

Then very quickly, as God allows it, I see another face, the face of the person who introduced you to Jesus Christ. I honestly believe that no one ever finds Christ just by himself. Two faces - - you, and the person who introduced you to Christ.

But I said there should be three faces, didn't I? Whose is the third face? - - the person to be introduced to Jesus Christ by you. That completes the picture.

Let me say very quickly to you, that when Philip went to tell Nathanael about Jesus Christ, Nathanael gave him a tough time. It's not always an easy thing to tell another person about Christ. Nathanael said to Philip, in a rather contemptuous manner, "Talk about Jesus to me? what good comes out of Nazareth?"...to say a disparaging and discrediting thing immediately. Philip, too wise to argue, simply said, "Well, why don't you come and see." Now you know what happened! Nathanael went to see.

But why did he? - - because there was something marked indelibly upon the fabric of Philip's heart that made Nathanael believe that Philip had really seen something that was worth seeing.

I can't turn my back upon this sacred desk at this moment without telling you that I am still seeing before me the announcement that appears in

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the bulletin, and still ringing in my ears something of the reference that was made to it during the announcement period at the lectern: tomorrow night there's a New Members Group to be formed. Do you know what? If only one-fifth of you who are present right now could take the example of Philip seriously, the Luther Room couldn't possibly accommodate the people who would come tomorrow night.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"A MAN NAMED NATHANAEAL"

The sermon for the day bears the title, "A Man Named Nathanael;" and the text is from the first chapter of John, it's the 46th verse:

"And Nathanael said unto him, Can there
any good thing come out of Nazareth?
Philip saith unto him, Come and see."

It was the time for the gathering of the disciples. Three already had been chosen. Who would be the fourth one? The first of course was Andrew... Andrew went immediately and got his brother -- of all people, a man named Peter!...and then one day Jesus saw a man to whom He simply said, "Follow me" ...and that man's name was Philip.

Philip was one of those men who had a way of taking things very seriously. If that's exactly what Jesus said, then he'd want to comply. But also, for some strange reason, he was a disciple with a half-turned face -- all the time he was looking at his new Master, he was also looking around to find somebody else whom he might enlist in the way that he was about to walk.

He hadn't gone very far until he saw a man whom he had met before, whom he knew. You see, they had come from the same town. His name was Nathanael, and he saw Nathanael sitting under a tree. And while he was there he blurted out, rather disjointedly, but nonetheless he exclaimed, "We found Him! We found Him! -- we found the One of whom the prophets have been speaking, Nathanael -- His name is Jesus, He's a carpenter's son -- He comes out of Nazareth."

...that's the way Philip spoke to the man who became the fourth disciple.

Maybe he would not have become the fourth disciple in your book. Had you been there, you might have marked him off as a very unpromising one at the

very beginning, because Nathanael's reaction was not very promising. It was a rather contemptuous remark that he offered to Philip -- "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" What can you do for a man who is going to talk like that at the very beginning?

Initial reactions are quite important, but not always to be trusted. You may have your first impression, you may stick with it if you will, but not always for your good. Sometimes yes, sometimes no, but not always. At least Nathanael proves the point. Was it a deliberate remark or was it a chance remark? I shall not argue the case. Nonetheless, the words were spoken.

Words, once spoken, can never be recalled. Some people go to their graves forever haunted by the things that they once said. There are some people cruel enough who will never allow people to forget what they once said -- even though they later might have changed their minds. As long as history will record the calling of men for the Master, at the very mention of the name Nathanael there will always be associated the contemptuous, "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?"

Again I say to you, you might have marked him off at the very beginning and said he's not promising material, there can't be room in the disciple band for the contemptuous. But Philip, bless his soul, wiser than either you or I, simply said, "Why don't you come and see for yourself." It's always the story of the true disciple.....

...I only know what He has come to mean to me

...I know the transformation that's taken place in

my life

...I know what I have seen, I know what I feel -- you

may be different, all I can say -- come on, find

out for yourself....

...and Nathanael, now, to his credit, went along to find out.

But always sing the praise of Philip, won't you? There must have been that transformation in Philip's life that made it almost mandatory for Nathanael to see this thing through. There was evidence enough in this man Philip.

Now when Nathanael came into the presence of our Lord, our Lord who sees all, who knows all, greeted Nathanael before Nathanael could even say anything at all. And how does Jesus deal with a man who is contemptuous? What initiatory step would Jesus take in behalf of a man who is not, to all intents and appearances, very promising? There's a glorious thing here. Before this contemptuous Nathanael could say anything, Jesus said, "Behold an Israelite in whom there is no guile." That's our Lord and Saviour for you! He is the encourager-of-men - - He is the one who is always trying to see them in their better light. He is not one to down-grade us. Like the woman will take a bouquet of flowers, you see, and so arrange them that the light in the room or the light from the window falls upon them to the advantage of the flowers - - so Jesus Christ is always arranging men so that the sunlight of His love falls upon them, and they are always seen in their better light. Whatever you do, don't overlook this, my friend.

For you see, ours is a world that has grown weary. Ours is a world that's forever looking for the mean and the contemptible. There's something happened to us! - something terrible has happened to our generation. We look for the dirt, and we parade it on Broadway...we put it into print, and we say, this is life - - look at it! - - stare at it!

There was a time when poets and writers and philosophers were always bringing to our attention God's noble dream for man, and saying, "Feast upon this - -

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- - look at it this way." But ours is the generation of those who reach after mud and dirt, slime and filth - - who magnify the depravity of human nature, and say, "This is it." We need to find walking along the way of life the Eternal Companion, the Perpetual Pilgrim, Jesus Christ, who when He meets us appeals to our finer nature, sinful though we may be, and always giving the accent to what a man could become.

Beloved, it's never, you see then, when we remember this man Nathanael confronted by Jesus Christ - - it's never what we bring to Christ that matters most. Weak, sinful people though we may be, it's what He offers to us that's of chiefest value. This whole encounter between Jesus and Nathanael spells it out for us. At first blush, Philip's friend isn't very promising material for the school of discipleship. His contemptuous "can-any-good-thing-come-out-of-Nazareth?" leaves ever so much to be desired. But over against this is that magnanimous, that forever charitable gesture of Jesus Christ which accents, and properly so, man's sinful possibilities - - his better features, his more promising aspects, if you please.

I can't tell you his name, but he's someone that I should like to have met. He was an English scientist of whom one day his biographer said, "He made it easy for people to believe in goodness. Whoever does that in any degree, through an unselfish deed, a courageous word or a compassionate thought, helps others to believe in the indestructibility of goodness." I come to this sacred desk this morning to shout with all the ardor of my soul for an increasing number of people to become apostles in behalf of goodness. This is why, I suppose, for one reason, I've always had a high regard for my Quaker friends. While for any number of reasons I could not become one with them, yet I will always sing their

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praise. For it's the Quaker, perhaps, more so than number of other people, who goes forever looking for that which is of God in every man. And it's a thrilling thing to discover that as you read the pages of early church history, that even though it was Augustine who emphasized the depravity of human nature, giving us the doctrine of original sin -- which we cannot ignore -- there was also at the same time an early church father who said, "Down deep in every man there is something of Jesus Christ." It is the Christ-conscious part of the human soul. When Jesus Christ encountered Nathanael -- that's the level at which He began to deal with him.

Whenever you think of Nathanael, this man who received more attention on his day of decision than any other disciple. You know that, don't you? Read for yourself the pages of the New Testament. With so many of them it was a "Follow me" -- and they got up and they went after Jesus.....but Nathanael? He's a bit different. John, in his fourth Gospel, gives him almost a sizeable paragraph, simply to indelibly impress upon the fabric of our minds that a man like Nathanael is worth working with, a man like Nathanael is worth signing for the Kingdom, because this is what Jesus knew about him: his chance or deliberate remark, no matter how contemptuous, was not typical of what he could become. Because Jesus who searches the hearts of men and knows their minds must have recognized how he was looking for a Messiah -- now perhaps he could deal only with a certain amount of information that he had. You see, he had been told that the Messiah would come out of Bethlehem. Philip blurts out, "This is Jesus of Nazareth".....so he may be handicapped by the limited information that he has. And a man can be forever confined within such limitations. But Jesus Christ knows better.

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With some profit, and with continuous edification, I recall my Sunday School days. We can't do it now as we did it then, I suppose nothing ever is as it was, but we used to all gather together in a room, the young and the old alike, and in that assembly period we'd have opening devotions with a song leader....and then he'd teach us to sing some of the old Gospel hymns. Oh, with the sophistication that comes with the theological seminary graduation, I have been taught to look askance at some of those hymns now. But I'll never short-change them for one thing at least - - it was clearly spelled out the relationship of God and the human heart. And in any number of those hymns there was always the fact that Jesus could change people's nature. Maybe you'll be fortunate enough now, to remember this hymn as I recall a stanza of it for you:

"Down in the human heart, crushed by the Tempter,
Feelings lie buried that Grace can restore,
Touched by a loving hand, awakened by kindness,
chords that were silent can vibrate once more."

...Edna St. Vincent Millay used to say,

"They may not need me, yet they might,
I'll let myself be just in sight,
A smile as small as mine may be
Precisely their necessity."

Despair not, my friend, as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ it's always possible to give the encouraging look, not to settle for the unfavorable first impression.

Temporarily, as I was putting the finishing touches on this sermon last night, temporarily I moved away from the desk, and I picked up a mimeographed sheet. It bears the title, "Home Study News". It's a page-and-a-half about the kind of thing that's happening here and there throughout the county, when some of our members, with no trumpets before them, have gone into the communi-

ties of the disadvantaged, culturally and economically and otherwise, and they're sitting down with them, helping them to improve their lot. I thought, when I read between the lines....

...it's easy to drive through Brookville Road.....Tobytown....

and to say to yourself, there's not much promising here...

...but I beg you to remember that on whatever score you wish to apply it, we have a Master who doesn't allow any man to think that of any other man...and incidentally, because this is true as far as He's concerned, there is hope for you and me.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"HE CAME - THE UNRECOGNIZED"

The sermon for the day bears the title, "He Came - The Unrecognized"; and the text, it's the 10th verse of the 1st chapter of the Gospel according to John:

"He was in the world, and the world was made
by him, and the world knew him not."

If you were given to eavesdropping in the days of the disciples, undoubtedly you would have heard by chance some of the remarks that they made about each other. It's always the nature of man, you see, to characterize other people, particularly those with whom they associate. They have a way of branding one another, for good, sometimes for ill. For what we say about other people has a way of registering in the minds of other people even before we have a chance to prove to them what we really are. Labels can be very damaging.

But in the case of John, strange as it may seem, whenever the disciples talked about him in all likelihood they said something like this, "Well John - he's something else!...for John was never less than John, he was always the same. And God be praised for it, when they spoke about John in this way, every one of them was giving him a compliment. They were recognizing his spiritual sensitivity, for of all the disciples, none was quite like John in being spiritually kin to the Master....

...it wasn't favoritism on the part of Jesus Christ that

enabled you to read in the pages of Scripture again

and ever so often, "And then Jesus took with him John - - "

...it wasn't an accident that it was John who stood at the foot of the cross when all the disciples had run away - one, you see, in the very glaring manner betraying him...one in almost as glaring a manner denying him

....it just didn't happen that John was there, and that our Lord should commend His mother into his keeping. John was always John, and when you read the pages of Scripture you can't find anything that anyone ever said in an unkind way about him - - they were never inclined to sell him short.

Why, that very day when he saw his Master for the first time, John didn't argue, John didn't hesitate one bit. The Master simply said, "Follow me"....and John left his fishing nets, got up, walked away! We can't find in the Scriptures any justification for the notion that John came and said to Jesus, "Speak to me, Master - - tell me I haven't done the wrong thing - - tell me, Master, that my first impression of you was a valid one."....you may read page after page and find no indication that this kind of thing ever occurred. Thomas might be the doubter....Peter might be the impulsive one.... Judas might betray. John was always sure. He was spiritually sensitive, more so than any of the others.

It must have hurt him a great deal when he recorded in this Gospel the fact that not everybody could think the way he thought, not everybody could feel the way he felt, not everyone could be as certain as he was. It must have grieved him a great deal to put down for you and me to read, and for all people in all the time to come who might ever read from the Good Book to say, well there it is - - John put it that way...."Jesus was in the world, and the world didn't know him."

Now this matter of being certain, this matter of becoming spiritually keen, this problem of being able to feel the nearness of God, clearly, is an exceedingly precious thing. But does it happen only to a few? Is Robert Browning absolutely right when he talks about his musician, using such words as these...

"God has a few to whom He whispers in the ear.
The rest may reason, and welcome,
Tis we musicians who know - - "

...I am inclined to think that John would say, "Browning, you do not speak the truth. It isn't only to a few that God will whisper in the ear. God whispers to every man, God makes Himself known to all. It may be only a few who hear Him, it may only be a few who respond, but the fault does not lie with God?

You who come from Presbyterian background will treasure these words, you may remember them from the Westminster Confession. The Church fathers were talking about how God reveals Himself, how God makes Himself known, how in one way or another God is always taking the initiative, God is always calling to us, God is always pointing to us, God is always drawing near to us....
...the Church fathers have phrased it for us in this fashion:

"The lights of nature, and the works of Creation and Providence, do so far manifest the goodness and the wisdom and the power of God, as to leave men inexcusable."

...now there you have it. Those who honestly believe that God has done such a good job of calling to us, approaching us, standing at the door outside of our lives and knocking gently - - that He has done it so well, that if a man cannot know it, then man cannot be excused!

The Church comes again to Advent. Properly so, she observes it in

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the calendar. In doing so, we are reminded of the lessons that history serves. Now history serves many purposes. None undoubtedly could be for our good as much as its 'instructive' role. All that has happened before should be remembered by us, that the mistakes of an earlier day do not become our lot. This is one justification for including Advent in the calendar of the Church.

And what would you say is a significant lesson of Advent? Is it not this -- that the Christ who came is also the Christ who comes, is also the Christ who will come again! Let us take heed lest we fail to see Him as He is. Advent's question, Advent's vital question is not -- will He come again? That's been settled centuries and centuries ago, when our Blessed Lord said, "Lo, I am always going to be with you." -- this is not the vital question. The vital question is this -- when He comes will I recognize Him?

It seems so hard for us to appreciate. No one, presumably, was ever more expected than Jesus Christ. Never in the history of man was a people made ready for the advent of the Messiah than were the Jewish people. They tell me, it could be only legend, yet it could be fact, there's something inherent in the truth that characterizes it -- -- that for years, as soon as a Jewish woman discovered that she was pregnant she offered a special kind of prayer...."Dear God, if it be Thy will, make it a boy; and if a boy, let him be the promised Messiah of whom the prophets have spoken -- "so deep-seated in the history and the tradition of a people was this expectancy. Yet when He came, they did not recognize Him!

How great and wonderful of our God to know that this could happen! -- and yet out of love for us He gives Himself, running the risk and the peril of being unrecognized, and subsequently rejected, and as we will talk next Sunday, the unwanted. How could this ever have happened? That's the question you and

I must ask, lest when He comes to us, lest when He comes again, we should be as blind and as guilty as they.

The text can stand careful reading, my friend. And in the third and the fourth careful reading of the text you might discover one reason that it happened - - - "He was in the world - -"

...they never expected to find Him that way! Nor do some of us. They expected that He was someone yet to come! It's a lot easier to handle God who is in the future. It's extremely difficult to deal with a God who is in the present tense. He can be so demanding, you see. He was in the world, I tell you - - that's the way the Scripture puts it - - - "in the world". Some people want a God out of the world. Be careful when you pray, lest when you look heavenward you think God is way out there! The Bishop of Wellrich is absolutely right when he brings to our attention, perhaps as no other voice in our generation, that when we are honest to God we may have to re-adjust some of our thinking concerning Him.

But you see, Jesus came, and He was born in Bethlehem....

...Jesus came, and grew up in Nazareth. We who say of Him, "Very God of very God, Begotten, not made, Being of one substance with the Father - -" have to say that of Him at any stage in His life, not simply when He was preaching a sermon. You have to say this when He was walking ankle-deep in shavings in a carpenter's shop....you have to say this of Him when He reaches for the yoke for the oxen and takes it from Joseph's hands, and then walks down the street to the outskirts of the village and delivers it to the peasant who had ordered it. He was "in the world"....and somehow they were unable to equate the fact of God with hands that could bleed when the fingers got in the way of the plane..

....somehow they had failed to equate the fact of God with the son of a carpenter, who could become infuriated by all the evil that He saw. He was "in the world"....they looked for God anywhere else but in the world. This was the problem.

And be careful, my friend, it can happen to you. There are some people who meet God only when they come here. Oh, we are to be grateful for that, and we ought to do everything in our power to make this place as something that reflects the nearness of God. Her walls should be kept beautiful, and once you enter this place your mind and your soul should be hushed, and you ought to be humbled. But when you come here to find God, you come here to find Him only that you shall recognize Him beyond these walls. This we must never, never forget....

...did you ever hear the legend - it's a very precious thing - about a monk, given to pious thoughts, who would go to his cell and bow his head and ask God to reveal Himself. He wanted to bask in the sunlight of God's love and God's glory. And so the monk would retire to his cell and he would pray. And then one day it happened - - as he prayed, God revealed Himself - - there was the vision!no sooner did the vision appear than the monk heard the ringing of a bell. Now it was the custom and the practice in that monastery, that when that bell would ring, the monks within the hearing of that bell would leave whatever they were doing, no matter what it was, and they'd give answer to that bell. And the bell invariably was rung by someone passing by in great need...

...impatiently, and with the greatest measure of reluctance, the monk went from his cell, turning his back, presumably, upon the vision splendid. He gave himself to a ministry of compassion, whatever it was....then rather

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eadly returned to his call. But lo and behold! when he entered, there in his call, much more so than ever before, was the Master, with a sweetness upon His face that he had not seen earlier, with a strength and a beauty that he had not seen when the vision first appeared...and then something happened now that did not happen earlier - the vision spoke, and the Master said, Had you tarried, had you delayed, had you not gone to answer the call of need, I would have disappeared - - now that you've gone, and you have provided a ministry of compassion, you see Me as I am, in all My beauty, in perfect glory."

You see, those poor people never quite understood how God could be found in the world, helping people, being kind to them. Ah, once there was a writer who remembered Jesus reverently, and he gave us that unforgettable characterization - - when he wrote about Jesus, he said, "He went about doing good."

He comes again, my friend. I'm about to believe that He won't change much when He comes again. I'm about to believe that when He comes today, He'll be just as busy, just as earnest, just as compassionate, doing the same kind of thing that He did when He came to Nazareth. I'm glad you have come here to look for Him. I'd be disappointed if you didn't feel Him here. But all that happens here is to sharpen your vision, to give strength to your muscle.....that once you turn your back upon this altar He will be a great deal plainer to you - - - out there.

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(This session transcribed as recorded)

"HE CAME - THE UNWANTED"

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The sermon for the day, another in the Advent series, bears the title, "He Came - The Unwanted"; and the text is from John's Gospel, the first chapter, and the 11th verse:

"He came unto his own, and his own received him not."

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There are some things that have happened that men don't like to remember. Yet one cannot censor history. You can't go back and say that what did happen did not occur. Maybe that's the way John felt when he remembered that day in Nazareth. It must have hurt him to the very heart - - if ever he was tempted to turn away from Jesus Christ, it might have been that day in Nazareth....if ever he had his real baptism as a disciple, it must have been that day in Nazareth. For that day in Nazareth, you see, is the glaring incident that prompted John the recorder to put it down in one sentence: "He came to his own, and they did not receive him."

If you don't mind, let me fill you in with the details. Only Luke gives us a full accounting. It may have been that John surely was present - - it may have been that John didn't want to talk about it any more. He simply had to make some reference to it, some unmistakable reference to it, that day in Nazareth.

He was the carpenter's son, you see.....

...He hiked the hills of Galilee....He had fished the nearby streams....He had slept underneath Galilean stars....He had

choice friendships with the boys of Nazareth...the people who had purchased things from Joseph's shop knew Him to be honest, trustworthy, women knew Him to be kind....
...everyone knew Him to be reverent...

...then one day He left Nazareth. Rumors had it that He had wandered away to be a kind of itinerant preacher. They said something had happened to Him, like a vision, like a call....and then reports kept coming back....

...blind men had their sight restored

...dead men were called back to life

....the crippled could walk unimpeded

.....and a whole lot of miserable folk who had met Him took a new lease on life. Some of them even got to the place, when they talked about Him, they talked about Him in hushed tones, as though He were God Himself.

...then there was that day in Nazareth, that day when He came back.

Had you been in Nazareth that day you would have sensed the excitement at once. It had been a long, long time that the synagogue was as filled as it was that day, in fact it was standing room only, and people were standing on the outside. Curious? Of course you'd be...and you'd say, "What gives? - - what goes on here?" And there are any number of people who would be quick to tell you, "Why, it's Joseph's son, he's come back. Can't you see him inside here - - stand alongside of me - - there he is! He hasn't changed much, has he? Why, I would know him anywhere. So he's come back, has he?"

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Then you'd stand there on the edge of the synagogue and you'd observe what was going on inside. The presiding elder in charge of the service came to that part where the lesson was to be read. There wasn't anything unusual about this: if a distinguished person was present the presiding elder might motion to that man to come forward, and he'd say some kind things about the man and give him the privilege of reading the lesson.....so maybe he talked in this fashion, "All of us in Nazareth remember Joseph's son. He made a good impression when he lived here and he's been away for some time, and we've heard nothing but good things about him. Jesus, welcome back. This is familiar ground to you - - you never missed a synagogue service when you were here. It's a pleasure to have you. Jesus, we'd be pleased if you'd read the lesson for us."

So He got up and went over to the sacred container, pulled out the scroll, unfolded it with the utmost of reverence, and then read the lesson for that day. It was a passage from a prophet by the name of Isaiah. Would you like to know what He read? Let me tell you....

"The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord hath appointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek and to the poor. He hath set me to bind up the broken-hearted, and to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prisons to them that are in chains, to comfort all who mourn."

When He finished with the lesson, Jesus reverently put the scroll back in its proper position and back into the sacred container. Then He sat down.

Ah, that meant something. Because once the lesson had been read and a man would sit down, that meant he was going to say something, he was going to speak. They listened. What would he say?

And then He said something, the like of which had never been said in that synagogue. Want to know what He said? I can tell you. He said something very daring - - almost reckless, quite incredible. He said, "Today this passage of Scripture is being fulfilled." And they knew exactly what He meant.....

...starry-eyed idealist - - that's what some people

had said about Him....visionary.....possessed - - now

they had proof positive....

...He's saying, "Today I'm going to put into practice what God prophesied - - today I'm going to see that the people in prisons are released - - today I'm going to see that the people who mourn are comforted - - today I'm going to spread good things, I'm going to talk about the wonderful truth of God."

And then they came back at Him. Some people were very, very unkind. They said, "Don't preach to us, mister" - - (I'm paraphrasing, of course I am) - - "Don't preach to us. Don't give us anything like that! Snap your divine finger and work a miracle! We've heard what you did in other towns -- we'll believe you, you're the miracle-worker. We don't need a preacher, we don't need a social reformer. The people in jail can stay in jail....the poor can stay poor....those who need comfort - - well they were miserable yesterday and one more day won't make any difference!"sure you can believe they talked like that!..... " - - but snap your divine fingers, Jesus, let's have a miracle."

And then He said something to them that they didn't like, and they could never forget. He said, "You can't have miracles in Nazareth, and I'll tell you why - - you don't have enough faith. You're not God-fearing enough. The people in the other town where I performed these miracles, they were."

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Well that did it! You know the upshot of the matter? This is where the face-spitting comes in, this is where they became riotous, this is where they pummelled His body with their fists, this is where they actually drove Him out of town! This is when, if they could have done it, they would have pushed Him over the cliff and broken His bones in bits.

You've never been jostled, you've never been pummelled? You've never been stoned? You've never had anybody spit in your face? You've never seen hatred in the eyes of people? You've never seen familiar faces become the faces of the Devil? You can't understand it. And if you would have been there when it occurred you wouldn't have believed it. This is why poor John, the sensitive soul, this is why, I think, when he writes about it, he simply gives a one-sentence recital: "He came to his own, and his own received him not." - - - the people who were being exposed to the most wonderful thing the mind of God ever conceived.

The most wonderful thing that the mind of God ever conceived - - you can call it Christmas - - God come to earth in Jesus Christ - - God come to us, God to walk where we walk, God to live where we live - - God to show us the way! Christmas is God's idea, you can't put it more eloquently than that. Of course man is absolutely incapable of thinking of something as wonderful as God-come-to-earth-in-Christ. But the tragedy isn't that man couldn't have thought up Christmas; the tragedy is that once it happened, man wouldn't believe it, man would not accept it. This is the greater sadness, this is the greater misery, because all that happened years ago is happening over and over again. For He who came comes.

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The sad thing about history is that there are always those who do not want Him. The saddest thing to be said about man is that God gives, man rejects. Why? That day in Nazareth, what can it say to you and to me? One thing perhaps is this: they did not want Him because they couldn't understand what was happening. You see, God is never fully obligated to tell us the whole story. God's not obligated to you and to me in any way. But there are some people, because they can't see at one time the whole picture, begin to reject this piece of it, and that piece of it, as it begins to unfold. This is why sometimes I think if I were chairman of a committee, I'd ask the members, I'd like for everybody to stay out of my way, pass no judgment on anything in the progress of the development of the idea until the thing dropped down full-fashioned in front of them, and then perchance they might see it, and accept it.

There were those who rejected Jesus Christ that day because they didn't know what God had in mind. They didn't know that God could work through people. They couldn't understand the fact that God could work through a carpenter's son. Oh, it was one thing to accept him as the kind and gracious carpenter's son who delivered the yoke for the oxen - - it was one thing to say nice things about him when he went frolicking over the hills, and when he came to Abraham's house and wanted to know if little Isaac was there, that they might go hiking next day - - he was such a pleasant, dark-skinned, brown-eyed chap, you see. But then for a grown carpenter's son to say, "I'm going to help the poor...I'm going to do something about people who are innocently imprisoned....I'm going to read the Bible, and I'm going to let it

become alive inside me." This they couldn't understand. And people don't want what they don't understand.

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People don't want what they think they don't need. They weren't in prison, they didn't see much value in getting people out of prison. They weren't sick -- they didn't see much value in having a good physician. They weren't lonely -- they didn't see much need in having somebody coming and identifying with them in their loneliness. Are you ready for it? There are those of us who don't see ourselves as sinners -- so we have no need for God, who comes as a Saviour. We just don't want Him, because we say, we don't need him.

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There are those who tell us that history keeps repeating itself. Students of history tell us that it goes in cycles, you see. You can reduce this to any level, like the father who tells me, "Pastor, I'm standing by helpless now, seeing my son make all the mistakes that I made, and he'll have to learn for himself. It's my story being written all over again in his name." History is just that, written largely, you see.

So Christmas, which is God's idea, happens over and over again. The faces change. The times may be different. But there are those who reject Him, "We don't want you."

I think there is one difference, however. Maybe we wouldn't pummel Him with our fists....maybe we wouldn't spit in His face -- we do this to people, we're not brave enough to do it to God. But as far as wanting Him? We don't say it in words....in the face of all of our sufficiency, in the face of all our sophistication, we just ignore Him, and I think that's the worst kind of rejection.

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When I was a lad I can remember mother saying to me about certain things, "Raymond, make up your mind - - you either want it, or you don't want it." Maybe God talks like that to us."Make up your mind about Jesus Christ." There are only two kinds of reaction: you either want Him, or you don't. Have you made up your mind yet?.....I have to ask you that, because we're his own, too. The Bible says, "He came to his own."

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"HE CAME - THE ACCEPTED"

Today's sermon in the Advent series bears the title, "He Came - The Accepted." The text is from the first chapter of John, and it's the 12th verse:

"But to as many as received him, who believed on his name, he gave power to become the sons of God."

You and I may say many things about God when we come to think about Him. One thing that we may say rather reluctantly is this: that from our point of view we have to admit that God is the great risk-taker, for when He's dealing with us He's never quite certain, so it would seem to us, just how we're going to react.

It's always been that way. You remember? - - we call Him Creator. He made the world, and He called it good. Everything that He had done He called good. And then He made us, and He said to us, "Live in it, enjoy it, make the most of it. I've made you in my image, so that you might respond according to my Spirit as you live in my world." You know the sad story. The first chapter that man wrote was the chapter called disobedience, which is basically refusing God's point of view...which is, of course, rejecting God's way of doing things. But God took the risk. It might have been otherwise.

It was that way when He gave us Jesus Christ....God come to us in the form of a human being. Born, cradled by Mary and by Joseph, then one day He grew up. God took the great risk - - - what will they do with Him? - - - how will they respond?

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Any traveler who goes to Nazareth will invariably want to look inside a carpenter's shop. In common with this manner and this mood of all tourists, I found my way, as you may remember, to Nazareth, and as I stood outside the door of a carpenter's shop -- didn't I tell you this before? -- I tried to picture what an artist had done with that moment when our Blessed Lord stood in the doorway of the carpenter's shop in Nazareth for the last time. It was at the end of the day. He had put His tools on the carpenter's bench....and then He stood there in the doorway facing out into the world, the great big world to which He was going to go, to wander from place to place within the confines of Palestine -- to preach and to teach and to tell people that God loves them, and that God wants them to love one another....and as He stood there He braced Himself there in the doorway of that carpenter's shop -- you know what the artist has done with that: he has the rays of the setting sun cast a shadow on the floor of the carpenter's shop, a shadow formed by the outstretched arms and the body of Jesus Christ...and the shadow is a cross. And the artist raises the question which becomes the title to his painting. "What will they do with me?".....and there was the predicted answer. Always, you see, the possibility of rejection.

Where you and I are concerned, even on a human level in inter-personal relationships, it's absolutely impossible to predict the patterns of human behavior. Wherever people are involved there is always a risk....

...people have been known to live together for years, decade after decade after decade, and then something happens, a relationship deteriorates - - you would never have predicted the outcome...

...a child grows up in a normal home, almost an ideal situation, and then one day something happens - - we never counted on it that way - - we can't quite understand it, but it did..

...a business relationship is established, a partner trusts another partner, they go along very well for a period of time....and then something happens that no one had predicted....

....in the realm of human relationships there is always the risk, and God's specialty is people.

God naturally then becomes, from our point of view, the greatest of all risk takers, and any story that you write about God's dealing with us is a story of risk.....will we respond favorably? or will we reject Him?

...will we obey...or will we disobey?

When you read the Bible you must always read it as though you want to get the whole story. That's another one of the precious things about the Bible, the Bible gives us the whole story. But it's not always easy to get the whole story about human behavior and human relationships. I have attended meetings on occasion, and later on I received the transcribed minutes of the meeting. But before I received those transcribed minutes of the meeting I had occasion to talk with people who had also been at the meeting, but they didn't know that I had been there. And then I hear what they said. And I discover every now and then that what they hear is what they want to hear! This is why tape recordings and photographs and the recording of minutes serve a necessary as well as a useful purpose, that the whole story might always

be told.

John, writing an account of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ wants to tell us the whole story about Christ. And that's why when you read one verse that he gave us, you can't stop there. I'm thinking now particularly of the 11th verse.....you have to go on just as quickly and read the next verse, because John in telling the story of Jesus Christ wants us to get the whole truth, the whole story.

Chapter one: it was last Sunday's sermon, honestly it was, and the text: "He came unto his own, and his own received him not." Chapter one in the life of Jesus: rejection, written largely, written clearly and plainly.

But John in dealing with us, in giving us the life and teachings of Jesus Christ says, "But you've got to know the whole story - - rejection is part of it, but it's not everything." And then there must have been a spring in his step and a light in his eye, and surely a song in his heart, when he recorded what serves as the text for today's sermon...

"But to as many as received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become the sons of God."

This, too, is the story. Always those who reject, always those who refuse. But any reading of history will have to include this chapter as well. And you know what? It's about the only worthwhile thing that can be said about us. There were those who responded to Jesus Christ. They've never been the world's majority, but that's beside the point, It's enough to be said that always there have been those who received Him, and wherever and whenever this has taken place man has come into his own, that is, into the stature that his Maker intended for him. For God made us to respond to Him, God made us to

receive Him -- God's label for every heart is "Bethlehem"...that's what He had in mind!

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I come to this sacred desk this morning with all the ardor of my soul, and as God gives me breath to my dying day, this I would like to make known: there are people who respond to Jesus Christ, there are people who accept Him, there are people who believe in Him. They may not make the headlines, you may have to look long and hard to find them, but they're there!

What is it, then, to receive Jesus Christ? What is it to accept Him? Well, must I not tell you this -- that you can receive only what's being offered. You can't get what isn't being given. Now there's a delightful thought for you. This is the picture of God with which we have to begin. He is the kind of God who is always coming to us. He is the kind of God who is always within reach. You haven't forgotten that imagery that I keep telling you, have you, the imagery in which I delight in telling you about God -- He is the one with the outstretched hand, and it's never empty....and He's always within reach. This is the fact with which we have to begin: He's always waiting to be received....He's always making the overture.

But even though He stands there, as far as the blessing in your life is concerned it has no value until you claim it, until you receive Him, until you open the door of your heart. The one undeniable fact of life that remains for some of us is this: that life demands the making of decisions. And the one undeniable fact that remains in our relationship to Jesus Christ is this: that you and I at some time or other have to decide, whether we receive Him, or

whether we reject Him. There is drawn through the line of your life this demarcation - - before and after Christ, which can be spelled out - - acceptance or rejection.

What is it, now, to believe in Him? What is it, now, to accept Him? John gives us the answer. He says people who accept Jesus Christ are people who believe in Him. It's important that you understand it that way. The trouble with our generation is this, that we're stressing too much the intellectual, we are deciding things only on the basis of what we actually know. And this is not a safe guide. A man is not saved by what he knows. It's absolutely impossible for any of us to know everything there is about God! - - to know everything there is about the human heart! - - to know everything there is about the diabolical aspects of wickedness. It's impossible.

Even Albert Schweitzer in his attempt to record the historical data related to the life of Jesus Christ, whether or not he could accept or confirm his belief in Jesus Christ on the basis of what he could find out about Him, and he gave us his book "Quest of the Historical Jesus." And Albert Schweitzer admits to a friend: historical documentation, the facts in the case as they actually existed, may not give enough to a man to either confirm or reject Jesus Christ of Nazareth...."but this I say to you, the spiritual influence of the man's life remains even to this day!" And Schweitzer could have gone on to say that over against that a man either accepts or rejects it. This, however, he did say:

"He comes to us as of old by the lakeside. He came to those men who knew Him not. He speaks to us the same words, 'Follow thou me!' And sets us to the tasks which He has to fulfill for our time. He commands. And to those who obey Him, He will reveal Himself in the toils,

the conflicts, the sufferings which they shall pass through in His fellowship, and as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience who He is."

And what is experience, except the whole chapter, written largely in our lives, of our response to pains.

When our Lord was here on earth, you know how He handled it -- He came to one person after another and He simply said, "Follow me"...and then they responded to Him, they believed Him, they trusted Him.

So it is today. When I come to you this morning I am fully aware of the fact that we live in an age which has more atheistic influences than in any other time in the history of mankind. That's a sobering thought....atheism is more rampant now than ever before in the history of the world! J. H. Oldham in his book "Life Is Commitment" gives us this significant fact: that one-third of the world's population consists of people who reject the fact of God. Even from within the Family, those whom we baptize, those whom we confirm in the Faith, those who sit and occupy chairs in certain theological seminaries, are telling us that God is dead, we've come to the end of the Christian Era...or become more and more people who are rejecting the fact of God.

I cannot begin to tell you how my soul is overwhelmed by the truth that as I read the Bible, and as I recall whatever years God has already given me, of the people that I've met who spell the lie to the fact that God is dead, they spell the lie to the fact that mankind, for the most part, rejects God. There are always those who are the responsive ones -- few in number, but God always has them, they're always there.

Do you remember what I once told you? -- about someone who came to
the old Methodist bishop and said, "How do you know that God is alive?"
....and he simply replied, "How do I know? -- this is how I know ----
....I just talked with Him this morning."

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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"A ROAD WITH MORE THAN ONE NAME"

Text: "And the shepherds said one to another, let us go even now unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us." (Luke 2:15)

Not all roads lead to Bethlehem, only certain roads with certain names.

There's a road named curiosity, let it be said quickly, reverent curiosity. One remembers the question that was asked, "Where is He?" Their concern, of course, was to find the way that would lead to His throne. Men do not come upon Bethlehem casually nor accidentally. The question must be asked, where is it? and, what happened there? ...and a man must make the decision as to whether he will take the road or not.

There is a road called humility. To this very day in Bethlehem town one enters the Church of the Holy Nativity only by lowering his head. One cannot enter it erectly. And this, too, is proper, for one bows before kings and kneels before God. They may tell you in Bethlehem to this very day that they lowered the entrance deliberately to teach humility, for generations ago they desecrated the holy place when an invading army quartered its troops there, and its soldiers, within the very area that we now call sacred. That it should never again occur, the entrance was lowered and narrowed and one enters almost alone, and always in a stooped and bowed fashion.

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It is a road called persistence, and you remember how the Scriptures put it, "and they followed the star until they came to the place - " - - it's that word until that deserves more than a second look. How long and tedious the journey must have been to the wise men, and what times of discouragement they must have had. Bethlehem is found only by those who refuse to retreat or give up the journey.

It is a road called reverence. The Scriptures say those who arrived worshipped Him. And to worship is always to keep a respectful distance between God and ourselves, to hold Him in awe and with reverence. One can't possibly arrive at Bethlehem without switching over to this road eventually, for He is manger-born King above all kings.

It's a road called love, for when the wise men arrived they opened their treasures and gave - - !

Not all roads lead to Bethlehem. Any one of these, however, will most certainly get you there. The tragedy is for many people that despite their noble intentions they could miss the right road.

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